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THE BEQUEST OF

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
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1918

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THE "TIMES" REVIEW OF McCLELLAN:

HIS

MILITARY CAREER REVIEWED AND EXPOSED.

[REVISED FROM THE N. Y. TIMES.]

BY

WILLIAM SWINTON.

Washington Editor N. Y. Times.

NEW YORK.
PUBLISHED BY THE N. Y. TIMES.
1864.

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McCLELLAN'S MILITARY CAREER

REVIEWED AND EXPOSED:

THE

MILITARY POLICY OF THE ADMINISTRATION

SET FORTH AND VINDICATED.

Published by the Union Congressional Committee.

WASHINGTON:
PRINTED BY LEMUEL TOWERS.
1864.

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1918

The following Chapters are a condensation and revision of the series of twelve articles in review of McClellan's Report, by WILLIAM SWINTON, published in the New York *Times*, during the months of February, March, and April, 1864. In the preparation of this criticism the author has to acknowledge the use of a large mass of unpublished official documents.

Swinton, William

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McCLELLAN'S MILITARY CAREER

REVIEWED AND EXPOSED.

I.

McCLELLAN AS A POLITICAL STRATEGIST.

It is a fact singularly characteristic of General McClellan that having won whatever reputation he enjoys in the field of *war*, he is now running on this reputation as the Presidential candidate of a party whose creed is *peace* and whose platform casts contumely on the very war of which their nominee had for upwards of a year the chief conduct. When we consider, however, that all his fame is founded on defeats, it is not wonderful that his hopes should still be bound up in defeats. General McClellan's Presidental prospects brighten just in proportion as our soldiers suffer disaster, and he will only be certain of being President of our country when it is certain we have no country at all.

There is no object more calculated to claim the sympathy of a generous people than a defeated general; and unless his failure has been associated with circumstances of personal turpitude he is pretty sure, sooner or later, to receive that sympathy. Machiavelli, that subtle observer, points out that the Romans never blamed their unsuccessful commanders, esteeming that to a high-minded man the mortification of defeat was of itself punishment enough. Sertorius, Mithridates and William of Orange were habitually unsuccessful generals, and yet history has not chosen to cast contumely on their names: on the contrary, the memory of their failures is covered up by the remembrance of qualities of mind that deserved, if they could not command, success.

It has been left for General McClellan, however, to claim not merely the sympathy of his countrymen (which would have been accorded him had his conduct been marked by the modesty of a soldier) but their admiration and highest rewards for a series of exploits in which the country suffered only disaster.

General McClellan's candidacy for the Presidency does not begin with the nomination at Chicago. While his soldiers were being struck down by thousands with the fevers of the Chickahominy, the fever of the White House struck him. There are a thousand things both in his military career and in his subsequent conduct that can only be explained on this theory. No doubt he would have been glad to have founded his Presidential pretensions on success; but as this was not possible he early conceived a characteristic change of base: he determined to found them on defeat. He could not make failures triumphs, but he would adventure a flanking movement in the field of politics more bold than any he ever essayed on the field of war: he would throw the burden of all his failures upon an Administration which thwarted all his brilliant plans and ensured defeat where he had organized victory! This desperate enterprise he has attempted to carry though in a document published a few months ago, which, under the guise of a "Report," is really an elaborate political manifesto.

Had General McClellan not been a prospective candidate for the Presidency, it would be difficult to bring his so called "Report" into any known category. If it is less than a Report it is also more than a Report. It is less than a Report because numerous dispatches of the time are omitted from this collection. It is also more than a strictly military Report, because its basis is an elaborate historical, and argumentative recital, in which such dispatches as are used by General McClellan are *inlaid*. Military Reports in the sense in which any soldier understands the

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term, are written either from the battle-field itself, or, in the impossibility of that, as speedily after the action as it is possible for the staff to collect the requisite data. There have been Generals who have seen fit at the close of their career to publish their dispatches in collected form. Such a legacy was left to military history by the great Iron Duke. But what is peculiar in Wellington's publication of his dispatches is that he has left these memorials of his career in their strict chronological order, in their exact original state: he has not suppressed a line, nor added a word of commentary, nor a word of argument, nor a word of accusation, nor a word of justification.

Not so General McClellan's Report. The labor of a whole twelvemonth, composed in the leisure of retiracy, and after the publication of most of the material likely to bear on his fame, its purpose seems less to record a series of military transactions than to vindicate his conduct and arraign the Administration. No charge is too great, none too small, to draw out from him a replication: and he is equally ready, whether to bring railing accusations against his military superiors, to bowl down the Committee on the Conduct of the War, or to blow up the newspapers.

In this state of facts, a critical analysis of this so-called "Report" becomes a matter which concerns the welfare of the country not less than the truth of history. It is to this task I propose addressing myself. It will be our duty to pierce to the historical truth underlying the veneer which General McClellan has spread over events, to endeavor to seize by the guiding-clue of unpublished dispatches how much here set down as original motive is really *afterthought*, and to examine the foundation of the charges which he heaps upon the Administration. If I do not succeed in proving by documentary evidence that every one of General McClellan's failures was the result of his own conduct and character,—if I do not prove his career as a whole to have been a failure unmatched in military history, and if I do not fasten upon him conduct which in any other country in the world would have caused him to be court-martialed and dismissed the service,—I shall ask the reader to accept his plea in abatement of judgment and accord him the patent of distinguished generalship. But if I make good all I have said, I shall ask the reader to characterize in fitting terms the conduct of a man who, receiving the heartiest support of the Government, the lavish confidence of the people, and the unstinted resources of the nation, achieves nothing but defeat, and terminates a career of unexampled failure by charging the blame upon an Administration whose only fault was not to have sooner to discovered his incapacity.

II.

THE "YOUNG NAPOLEON."

It was the good fortune of General McClellan to come into command while the public mind was in a peculiar mood. The disastrous upshot of a forward movement in which the nation was conscious of having used too great urgency had given rise to complete abnegation of all criticism on the part of the people and the press. Bull Run had educated us, and, in a fit of patriotic remorse, men renounced everything that might appear like pressure on the Government or the commanders of our armies.

The nation did more: it literally threw open its arms to receive the young chief chosen to lead its foremost army. He came in with no cold suspicion, but with a warm and generous welcome. It will always remain one of the most extraordinary phenomena of our extraordinary times that a young man without military experience, leaping from a captaincy to the highest grade in our military hierarchy, and bringing with him only the prestige of a series of small operations which another than he planned and executed,* should have been at one received into the nation's confidence and credited in advance with every military quality and capacity. It may not be very flattering to our common sense to look back at the time when this hero of unfought fields was taken on trust as a "young Napoleon;" but it remains, nevertheless, a piece of history; and when a few weeks after assuming command, he told his soldiers, "We have had our last retreat, we have seen our last defeat—you stand by me and I'll stand by you," a too-confiding people applauded the bombast as having the true Napoleonic ring!

Beyond a doubt these things showed the military juvenility of America; but they were none the less the manifestations of a mood of mind which an able Commander

*I mean of course General Rosecrans. The Report of that general, including his operations in Western Virginia, will, it is hoped, soon be published.

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could have turned to immense account. General McClellan had but to ask, and it was given him—indeed it came without asking. Every energy of the Government, and all the resources of a generous and patriotic people, were lavishly placed at his disposal, to enable him to gather together an army and put it in the most complete state of efficiency, so that offensive movements might be resumed at the earliest possible moment. The *time* of that movement was, however, with a scrupulous delicacy left in the hands of the Commander himself. General McClellan complains of the "vehemence with which an *immediate advance* upon the enemy's works directly in our front was urged by a patriotic people." I am very sure that not only was no "immediate advance" urged, but that no advance at all was expected during any portion of the period in which General McClellan says he was engaged in organizing the army. "It was necessary," says he,* "to create a new army for active operations and to expedite its organization, equipment, and the accumulation of the material of war, and to this not inconsiderable labor all my energies for the next *three months* were exerted." As General McClellan assumed command of the army in the latter part of July (27th), the "three months" spoken of would bring us to the 1st of November. Now it would not be difficult to show that during no part of that period did the public show anything like "vehemence" for an advance. The country understood that a new army had to be organized; indeed there was if anything, a disposition to exaggerate both the time required for this work and its inherent difficulties; and as a large share of the fame of General McClellan rests on the theory of his having "organized" the army, it may be worth while making a brief diversion to penetrate into the interior of this awful mystery of organization.

One would suppose from the tone of General McClellan that when he came to the Army of the Potomac there was no army to command. "I found," says he (page 44), "no army to command—*a mere collection of regiments*, cowering on the banks of the Potomac, some perfectly raw, others dispirited by the recent defeat." Now, the facts of the case are that he came into command of fifty thousand men, and they were very far from being "a mere collection of *regiments*." The brigade and divisional organization existed and *had* existed, having been established by General McDowell. The organization of modern armies is a matter long ago fixed, and is not an affair which admits either of invention or of innovation. The hierarchy by the battalion, brigade, division, and corps, first formulated in the *Ordonnance du Roi*, is the military system of every European nation; and our own military code is, in fact, a translation of it. It is not clear, therefore, how there was room for the exercise of any such mysterious powers of organization as have been attributed to General McClellan, and he certainly put forth none. He found the framework of brigades and divisions, and he continued it, simply piling up *more* brigades and *more* divisions.† There only remained to push the organization one step higher, and that step he did not take. Our regular army having always been very small, no higher unit of organization than the *division* had existed or had been required. What became absolutely necessary as soon as the needs of the war created great armies of one or two hundred thousand men was to establish the higher fighting unit—the *corps d'armée*—without which no large army can effectively enter upon an active campaign. *General McClellan would never consent to the establishment of corps.* The only novelty of organization, therefore, which it was possible for him to institute, he would not and did not. He left the army an acephalous agglomeration of thirteen divisions, without correlation, unity or cohesion; and it became necessary for the President, months afterwards, and in opposition to General McClellan, to constitute corps just as the army was on the point of setting out on an active campaign.

The period of three months during which General McClellan, according to his own statement, was engaged in reorganizing the army, having passed,—the Government and the nation became naturally anxious that the splendid army of over a hundred and fifty thousand men, which had by this time grown up on the banks of the Potomac, should be turned to account. Our foreign relations, our domestic interests, our national honor—every consideration conspired to urge an attack on the insolent foe who held the Capital in siege. But during no period of the six months succeeding the 1st of November—and during all of which period the motives for an

* Report, p. 6.

† Whatever credit is claimed for the *practical* organization of the army belongs to Brigadier-General (now Major-General) Silas Casey, a painstaking tactician, who labored with tireless assiduity at the task of brigading the newly arrived regiments. The assumption of the credit of this work by General McClellan is a flagrant instance of *sic vos non vobis:*

"The knight slew the boar,
The king had the gleire."

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advance became progressively more and more imperative—did or would General McClellan consent to move his army. If there are any considerations that go to justify this delay, it is only fair to General McClellan that he shall have the benefit of their full weight, and this subject is worth examining with some fulness, because there is a close logical connexion between that long inaction and all the subsequent ill fortune of the Army of the Potomac.

III.

A HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND MEN "IN BUCKRAM."

There is one characteristic of General McClellan which displays itself so persistently, both in his Report and in his conduct, that it must belong to the very structure of his intellect. What I mean is a certain inequality of vision which puts facts out of all just relations, gives him one standard of judgment for himself and another for others, and leads him to a prodigious over-estimate of immediate, and a prodigious under-estimate of remote difficulties. "The first qualification in a general," says Napoleon, "is a cool head—that is, a head which receives just impressions, and estimates things and objects at their real value. Some men are so constituted as to see everything through a high-colored medium. Whatever knowledge, or talent, or courage, or other good qualities such men may possess, nature has not formed them for the command of armies, or the direction of great military operations." This key will aid us in the interpretation of that extraordinary tendency to exaggerate the force of the enemy which we find him displaying at the very outset of his career, and which continued to grow upon him throughout its whole course.

The first instance in which we have a distinct utterance from General McClellan on the point of the relative strength of his own and the enemy's force is in a letter addressed by him to the Secretary of War in the latter part of October, 1861.* In this communication he uses the following language:

"So much time has passed, and the winter is approaching so rapidly, that but two courses are left to the Government, viz.: to go into winter quarters, or to assume the offensive *with force greatly inferior in numbers to the army I regarded as desirable and necessary.*

Now, the first question is, what number he regarded as not only "desirable" but "*necessary*," in order to enable him to assume the offensive. Happily, on this point we have from himself precise information, for in a subsequent part of the same communication he gives what he calls an "estimate of the requisite force for an advance movement by the Army of the Potomac." It is as as follows:

"Column of active operations	150,000 men,	400 guns.
Garrison of the city of Washington	35,000 "	40 "
To guard the Potomac to Harper's Ferry	5,000 "	12 "
To guard the Lower Potomac	8,000 "	24 "
Garrison for Baltimore and Annapolis	10,000 "	12 "
Total effective force required	208,000 men,	488 guns,

or an aggregate, present and absent, of about 240,000 men, should the losses by sickness, &c., not rise to a higher per centage than at present."

As the strength of an army, like any other means for the accomplishment of a certain end, is necessarily controlled by the object to be accomplished and the resistance to be overcome, we must seek the rationale of the extraordinary estimate put forth by General McClellan of the military force required as an indispensable condition precedent to any offensive operations, in his calculation of the strength of the army which the rebels were able to confront him withal. Fortunately on this point, also, we are not left in the dark, for he goes on to state that all his information showed that in November, 1861, "the enemy had a force *on the Potomac, not less than* 150,000 *strong, well drilled and equipped, ably commanded, and strongly entrenched.*"

If it be true that at any period during the fall or winter of 1861–2, the rebels had "*on the Potomac*" an army of the strength claimed by General McClellan—an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men—then we must concede that his estimate of the army he himself needed—namely, an effecting fighting column of the same strength—was not excessive, and that his reiterated demands for more men, even at this early period, were the result of a wise appreciation of the necessities of the case. But if it can be shown that this rebel colossus of a hundred and fifty thousand men was a monstrous delusion, the figment of a "heat-oppressed brain," we shall require to find other terms in which to characterize his conduct and his clamor.

* Report, p. 8.

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Now, I think I can show that the rebel army on the Potomac, so far from being of the force of 150,000 men, was never more than *one-third* that number. The battle of Bull Run was fought on the part of the rebels with a force of less than thirty thousand men. General Beauregard, in his official report, says: "The effective force of all arms of the (Confederate) Army of the Potomac on that eventful morning, including the garrison of Camp Pickens, did not exceed 21,833 men, and 29 guns. The Army of the Shenandoah, (Johnston's,) ready for action in the field, may be set down at 6,000 men and 20 guns, and its total strength at 8,334."

We are then to believe that the rebel army in the interval of three months, between the end of July and the end of October, leaped from thirty thousand men to a hundred and fifty thousand! *Credat Judæus!* It is too monstrous to believe. It would take double the time even to brigade such a herd of men. It would indeed be difficult to say what the precise strength of the rebel force was during the period referred to, especially as it varied greatly, having attained a certain maximum, then declined by the expiration of the term of service, and then commenced to ascend once more when the first conscription came into force. I do not, therefore, attempt to do this. I merely desire to show that the swelling figures that affrighted the soul of the then head of the Army of the Potomac existed only in his imagination, and to fix a maximum beyond which it is certain the rebel army did *not* go.

During the autumn of 1861, while the rebel army was still at Centerville, a letter written from that place fell into the hands of the military authorities. The writer, referring to the flutter that existed in the ranks of their army in regard to the creation of a certain number of Major Generals, tells how the Confederate Army was organized into brigades of four divisions each, like ours, but that they only put two brigades into a division—that is, they put eight regiments or battalions instead of twelve, as we have. "Now," says the writer, "this makes quite a stir as to the appointment of the twelve Major Generals." This would give them twenty-four brigades, or ninety-six regiments. The average strength of their regiments at that time certainly did not exceed that of our own at the same period, 600 men; and this would give them a total of 57,600 men.*

Now, it is worthy of note that General McClellan himself, six months after the date of his estimate of the rebel force "on the Potomac," at 150,000 men, gives another estimate made by his chief of the secret service corps on the 8th of March, in which the rebel troops at Manassas, Centreville, Bull Run, Upper Occoquan, and vicinity are put down at 80,000. Note that this was after the rebel conscription had gone into force and had swelled the Confederate ranks with its harvesting; and that, notwithstanding all this, it gives a result *less by seventy thousand* than the figure made out by General McClellan in the month of November. At one stroke the rebel hundred and fifty thousand in buckram had dwindled by a half!

From all these data, I believe I am authorized in concluding that Johnston at no time had on the Potomac an army of over 50,000 men. And it was before this contemptible force that our magnificent army of three times its strength—no, not the *army*, but its *commander*—stood paralyzed for eight months! Such a spectacle the history of the world never before presented.

Whether General McClellan ever really *believed* that he had in front of him an army of a hundred and fifty thousand men, or anything like that figure, is a point which I do not pretend to determine.† But certain it is that having fixed upon this number, all his subsequent efforts seem to have been directed, not to the task of destroying the enemy before him, but of forcing the Government to give him a command which he could never have brought into action in any battle-field Vir-

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*There are those, indeed, who put the rebel force on the Potomac at an even lower figure. Mr. Hurlbert, who at this time was within the rebel lines and had access to good sources of information, says in the notes to his translation of the pamphlet of the Prince de Joinville on the Army of the Potomac.

"I have reason to believe that when the history of the present war shall come to be written fairly and in full, it will be found that General Johnston never intended to hold Manassas and Centreville against any serious attack; that his army at those points had suffered greatly during the autumn and winter of 1861-2, and that from October to March *he never had an effective force of more than 40,000 men* under his orders."

†It is possible he did, for it is astonishing the tricks which the fears and the fancies of a man thus unhappily organized will play him; and I am willing to believe that General McClellan was quite as much deceived as deceiving. It is possible General McClellan really *believed* the rebels had 150,000 men on the Potomac, when they never had a third of that number, just as it is possible he believed they had one hundred thousand, then two hundred thousand, then two hundred and fifty thousand men on the Peninsula, when the truth was they never had over 70,000 men—or as he believed they invaded Maryland with a hundred and eighty thousand men, when their total force was fifty-five thousand. All this, I say, is possible; but alas for the hapless nation whose fate was committed to the keeping of *such* a leader!

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ginia furnishes. From this time forth begins a series of whinings and whimperings for troops, the most extraordinary ever put on record. "I have not the force I asked for;" "send me more troops," became the perpetual cry. These, with the occasional expression of his determination to "do the best he can" with what pitiful force he had, and to "share its fate," form the staple of every communication.

Now, when General McClellan was forming this heroic resolve, will any one imagine how much of a force he had? He had asked for 240,000 men, from which to take a fighting column of 150,000. It is true, he was never able to get this number, but it is perhaps worth while determining what he *did* get.

It appears from the official reports that on the morning of the 27th October, the aggregate strength of the Army of the Potomac was 168,318 men—present for duty, 169,452. On January 1, 1862, it was 219,707—present for duty, 191,480. On February 1, it was 222,196—present for duty, 193,142. Such was the pitiful bagatelle of a force he had under his command! He had asked for 240,000; he could never get over 222,196; and one can sympathize with his sense of ill treatment in consequence.

We think, however, that we have read of brilliant campaigns and splendid victories achieved with something less than two hundred and forty thousand men. If we recollect aright Napoleon made his first great Italian campaign with under forty thousand men; fought Austerlitz with forty-five thousand and Marengo with thirty-five thousand; and we think we have heard that Wellington, in the whole Peninsular war, never had over thirty thousand; that Turenne more frequently commanded ten thousand than fifty thousand; that Marlborough won Blenheim with fifty six thousand, and Ramillies with sixty thousand troops; and that Frederick the Great conducted the Seven Years' War, against a coalition of more than half of Europe, with an army never exceeding a hundred thousand men. But they were old fogies in those days, and it was left for the "*Young* Napoleon," who had never handled ten thousand troops in his life, to require *double* a hundred thousand to fill up the measure of his swelling ambition.

In fact, the trouble was not that General McClellan had too small a force; he had too *large* a force. He had fashioned a Frankenstein which all his power could not control—a sword was put into his hand which not only he was unable to wield, but which dragged him to the ground.

IV.

THE MODERN FABIUS AND HIS FALSE PRETENCES.

Were it true that the army put into the hands of General McClellan, instead of being twice or thrice the strength of the rebel force on the Potomac, as I have shown, was in reality doubly outnumbered by an enemy "not less than 150,000 strong, well drilled and equipped, ably commanded, and strongly entrenched;" the fact might well give us cause before passing censure on an inactivity which, however deplorable, would still have had much to warrant it. But you have seen how this pretence has been swept away by a scrutiny of facts; and I now proceed to show that the only remaining excuses he offers are equally without foundation. These are summed up in the following paragraph:*

"The records of the War Department show my anxiety and efforts to assume active offensive operations in the fall and early winter. It is only just to say, however, that *the unprecedented condition of the roads and Virginia soil* would have delayed an advance till February, had the discipline, organization, and equipment of the army been as complete at the close of the fall as was necessary, and as I desired and labored *against every impediment* to make them."

The first element enumerated is the roads and the weather, the condition of which General McClellan tells us was "unprecedented." If there be any inference to be drawn from this expression and its context, it is that they were "unprecedentedly" bad, for this reason is given in excuse for not moving. Now it is true that the condition of roads of Virginia during the fall and winter of 1861–2 was "unprecedented," but unprecedently *good*—and this, happily, is not a matter in regard to which we are left to the unsure testimony of memory. We have cotemporary evidence which establishes the fact by an accumulation perfectly irrefragable. General Franklin,† testifying under oath to this specific point, on the 26th of December, 1861, says: "The condition of the roads is good." General Wadsworth,‡ on the same day says: "The roads are remarkably good—*perhaps not once in twenty years have the roads at Christmas been in as good condition as they are now. Having had*

*Report, p. 35.
†Report on the Conduct of the War, vol. 1, p. 23.
‡Ibid, p. 146.

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this long period of dry weather, the roads are very good." So General Fitz John Porter,* in reply to a query as to the condition of the roads, says: "As far as I know they are in excellent condition, excellent travelling condition." In like manner testified a score of officers; I need not cite their evidence, but will limit myself to the testimony of a rebel witness. Pollard,† in a passage, the sting of which is sharpened by its justice, says: "A long, lingering, Indian summer, with roads more hard, and skies more beautiful, than Virginia had seen for many a year, invited the enemy to advance. He steadily refused the invitation to a general action. The advance of our lines was tolerated to Munson's Hill, within a few miles of Alexandria, and opportunities were sought in vain by the Confederates, in heavy skirmishing, to engage the lines of the two armies."

Precisely the same tendency characterizes General McClellan's estimate of the comparative *condition* as of the comparative *strength* of his own and the enemy's army. His communications of the period referred to make frequent mention of the superior discipline, drill and equipment of the rebels, and the inferiority in these respects of his own force. Now it is difficult to conjecture on what basis General McClellan constantly makes this assertion of the superior fighting powers of the rebels, unless—with a credulity insulting to the manhood of the loyal States—the rebel rhodomontade on this head had been swallowed entire by him. Abstractly considered, they ought to have been not better soldiers but worse; for though their habits of life and social training had been of a kind to make them *ultimately* very excellent soldiers, they were calculated to make them very inferior soldiers at the outset.‡ And this view of it is fortified by historical testimony; the evidence of all observers goes to show that previously to the organization of the permanent Confederate Army in April and May, 1862, and while the provisional army was still in existence and officers were elected by the men, nothing could exceed the laxity of discipline, the demoralization of temper, and the inferiority in arms, equipment, and transportation, that marked the rebel force in Virginia. If that force afterward became an army whose formidable valor and superb discipline we have too often found out to our cost, it is to be attributed in great part to the *time* General McClellan gave them for consolidation, and the prestige they gained by their victories over *him*.

But all comparison is superfluous; what I say is that General McClellan's claim that there was anything in the discipline of his army to prevent his dealing a blow at the enemy before him, is a shallow makeshift that will no longer serve. If it had been designed to make a Prussian or an English army—a thing of pipeclay and pedantry, of the rattan and red tape—there might be some force in the call for months or for years, in which to perfect this painful and useless education. But for modern armies there is but one way; it is, after the rudiments of tactics are acquired, to put the men promptly into the field and let them be *made* soldiers by the hard realities of war. It was in this way, and not by the pedantry of the martinet that the armies of the Thirty Years' War, of the American Revolution, and of the great French Revolution, were formed. In 1813 rough German levies fought almost before they were drilled, and at Bautzen French recruits were victorious over the elaborately trained machines that formed the armies of Austria, Prussia and Russia. Disastrous as Bull Run was in its military results, it, beyond a doubt, did more to make our men *soldiers* than all the reviews, parades, and sham fights, with which General McClellan amused a country whose life and national honor were all the while ebbing away.

I have now exhausted the several reasons alleged by General McClellan in excuse for his long delay, from August, 1861, to April, 1862. I have shown that there is nothing in these excuses, whether drawn from the condition of the roads and the season, or from the strength and discipline of our own army, or that of the rebels, to justify it. No, no! Not all the shallow devices which a year of afterthought can bring to the extenuation of military incapacity can either explain or exculpate that fatal delay which gave the rebels their best ally, Time; which made the timid among us despair, and the proudest hang their heads with shame; and which almost authorized foreign recognition of the rebellion by our seeming inability to put it down.

V.

"MY PLAN AND YOUR PLAN."

Whether General McClellan *ever* would have been ready to advance on the enemy, is a problem the solution of which is known only to Omniscience; but the spell

*Ibid. p. 171.
†First year of the War, p. 178.
‡Prince de Joinville on the Army of the Potomac, p. 101.

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was at length broken, not by the motion of McClellan, but by a word of initiative uttered by the President. On the 27th of January, 1862, Mr. Lincoln issued "General War Order No. 1," directing "that the 22d day of February, 1862, be the day for a general movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces."

As the reason for ordering a "*general* movement" on the day indicated may not be universally intelligible and has frequently been made a matter of wonderment by General McClellan's partisans, a word on that head will not be out of place. Shortly after coming into command of the Army of the Potomac, General McClellan began to urge that all the armies of the Union should be put under the direction of a "single will." In his letter of October, 1861, addressed to the Secretary of War, we find him urging this with the utmost emphasis, and even making it *an indispensable condition of any advance by the Army of the Potomac.**

Action, on *any* terms, being the supreme desire of the Government, General McClellan was, on the 1st of November, invested with the control of the armies of the United States as General-in-Chief. Bewildering though one finds the retrospect of such impotence of ambition as inspired this man to take on his pigmy shoulders a burden which a colossus like Napoleon never attempted to bear—the task of at once personally directing the operation of an army of two hundred thousand men in an active campaign, and superintending the advance of half a dozen other armies arrayed along a front of five or six thousand miles—it remains, nevertheless, a fact of history.

Having been vested with the control of all the armies of the Republic, General McClellan conceived the plan of a *simultaneous advance* of all these forces—a plan, which considering that the several armies were, as I have said, distributed along a front of five or six thousand miles, with lines of operation running through different climates and varying weather, was as impossible as it was puerile. At the wave of the baton of the mighty maestro the whole vast orchestra was to strike up. Until then, let all men hold there peace! In a word, we have here the first draft of that famous "anaconda" strategy, which planted a dozen different armies on as many lines of operation, all on the exterior circumference of the rebellion, leaving the rebels the enormous advantage of their interior position and giving them ample time to fortify at every point.

And it was in view of this favorite plan of General McClellan for a *simultaneous advance* along the whole line that the above Executive order directing a "general movement" on the 22d of February was issued.†

An *advance* having at length been decided on, it remained to determine the *line* by which this advance should be made, being in mind the double objective of—1st, the rebel army at Manassas, and 2d, the rebel capital, Richmond.

It is quite certain that up to November General McClellan held no other view of a forward movement than a direct advance on the enemy before him. At what time and by what counsels he altered his mind in this regard are points on which we have no information. But a change of purpose had meantime taken place, and when the President, four days after the promulgation of this General Order for an advance, issued Special War Order No. 1, directing a flanking movement on the rebel position at Manassas, it immediately appeared that he and General McClellan had different views in regard to the line of operations to be taken up.

Against this proposition General McClellan set his face with a determination much stouter than the logic which he employed to support that determination. Having obtained permission to submit his objections to the plan, we find a long letter from him addressed to the Secretary of War, under date of February 3,‡ in which the question of the comparative advantages of a movement on the enemy at Manassas, or a transfer of his army to a base on the lower Chesapeake, is elaborately discussed. This is a problem of capital importance, and so I shall enter with some fulness into the analysis of his reasoning—endeavoring not to omit a single point of any weight or value.

At the outset of his discussion of a movement on the enemy at Manassas, by the rebel right flank, General McClellan makes certain admissions as to the advantages of such an attack, to which I call the particular attention of the reaper, for I regard them as decisive of the whole question as to the comparative advantage of an attack on Manassas, or a transfer of base to any point on the lower Chesapeake. He admits that an attack on the rebel right flank by the line of the Occoquan would

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* Report, page 67.

† General McClellan had promised, if made General-in-Chief, to assume the offensive before the 25th of November. I need hardly say that this promise was as little kept as all his others.

‡ Report, pages 43–48.

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"prevent the junction of the enemy's right with his centre," affording the opportunity of destroying the former; would "remove the obstructions to the navigation of the Potomac;" would "reduce the lenghth of wagon transportation," and would "*strike directly at his main railway communication.*"

Assuming the successful execution of this plan what would have been the result? Let General McClellan answer himself:

"Assuming the success of this operation, and the defeat of the enemy as certain, the question at once arises as to the importance of the results gained. I think these results would be confined to the possession of the field of battle, the evacuation of the line of the upper Potomac by the enemy, and the moral effect of the victory; important results. it is true, but not decisive of the war, nor securing the destruction of the enemy's main army, for he could fall back upon other positions, and fight us again and again, should the condition of his troops permit."

A tactical victory in the field, the compulsory retreat of the enemy from his cherished position, the relief the blockade of the Potomac, and the "*moral effect of the victory*," with the losses, disasters, and demoralization that would have been inflicted on them—all of which General McClellan admits were within his grasp, by the movement indicated—were surely well worth the effort. Why, considering what a priceless boon such a result would have been at that time, the whole nation would have called him blessed! But it would not have been "decisive of the war"—such was the wildly puerile ambition that possessed him; and in order to end the war, he resolved to seek a theatre where it was perfectly evident beforehand and became a sad matter of fact afterward, that he would find all the obstacles there were at Manassas with none of its advantages.

This theatre of war was some point on the lower Chesapeake bay, either Urbana on the Rappahannock or Fort Monroe. The advantages of this base, according to Mc'Clellan's reasoning, is that "it affords the shortest possible land route to Richmond, striking directly at the heart of the enemy's power in the East," and that "*the roads in that region are passable at all seasons of the year.*"

It is on this enormous assumption that he bases the whole plan of campaign! He proposes to embark his troops at Alexandria, go down the Chesapeake bay, and up the Rappahannock to Urbana, or down to Fortress Monroe, with the view of there finding a passage to Richmond, where the roads would be "passable at all seasons." It is hard to tell where to begin answering a statement like that. How did he know the roads there were "passable at all seasons?" It would certainly be natural to conclude, from the mere physical geography of the region, that the roads are *not* "passable at all seasons." We have there precisely the physical conditions to make impassable roads—a region on the drainage and "divides" of rivers, where the streams, losing their force, spread out in swamps and bogs. But if, going beyond theoretical considerations, General McClellan had taken the trouble to look at the map, he would have noticed, on the march of fifty miles from Urbana to Richmond, the "Dragon Swamp," and half dozen other swamps, besides the Pamunky the Matapony, and the Chickahominy. On the Peninsula we need not say he *would* have found; we know what he *did* find. It is melancholy to think that the fate of a campaign should be intrusted to a mind capable of such stupendous assumptions.

The fact of the matter is, *McClellan's mind had already broken down before the problem given him to solve, his courage had oozed out, and in this mood he was willing to look anywhere, anywhere away from the task before him.* But it was not long before he practically demonstrated that, in transferring his base from Washington to the lower Chesapeake, he merely shifted, but did not remove the difficulty. *Cœlum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt.* In running "across the sea," indeed, he changed his "sky," but not the task imposed upon him. It still met him in the face as knotty and more knotty than before. It was with a quite prophetic consciousness of this fact that President Lincoln, on the same day as that on which General McClellan's letter is dated, sent to him the following note:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, *February* 3, 1862.

MY DEAR SIR: You and I have distinct and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac. Yours to be done by the Chesapeake, up the Rappahannock to Urbana, and across land to the terminus of the railroad on the York river; mine to move directly to a point on the railroad southwest of Manassas.

If you will give satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours:

1. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of *time* and *money* than mine?
2. Wherein is a victory *more certain* by your plan than mine?
3. Wherein is a victory *more valuable* by your plan than mine?

In fact, would it not be *less* valuable in this: that it would break no great line of the enemy's communication, while mine would?

5. In case of disaster, would not a retreat be more difficult by your plan than mine?

Yours, truly, ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The sagacity of these queries is not less conspicuous than the compendious com-

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pletemess with which they cover the whole ground. They were never answered simply because they were and are unanswerable. But President Lincoln, feeling the weight of the maxim, that a general will do better following an inferior plan which is his *own* than a superior one which is the conception of another, and, above all, desirous that *some* move should be made, and willing to sacrifice any minor consideration to that end, allowed General McClellan to have his own way.

That general and his partisans have a great deal to say about the supposed interference on the part of the authorities at Washington with his plans and purposes, and no opportunity is lost to give currency to the notion that it was the intermeddling of a species of "Aulic Council" at Washington which caused those failures which a juster criticism is compelled to lay at the door of his own military incapacity. This subterfuge will no longer serve, for the evidence of his own report, when carefully collated, utterly explodes this claim. It is a fact worthy of note that the investigations of modern German historians have conclusively proved, that the vituperation which an intense partisanship cast upon the Austrian Aulic Council, and which has passed into and long held a place in the acceptance of history, is itself utterly without foundation, and some degree of historical justice is now done a body which bade fair to enjoy a maligned immortality. But it needs no nice historical criticism to show that the shallow claims of the same sort, put forth to extenuate McClellan's blunders, are even more baseless. If the President, as the Constitutional head of the army, is blameable in any aspect of his dealings with that general, it is because he abnegated himself too much—surrendered too much of his own authority, and gave into the hands of an untried man a power little short of the despotic. While history will recognize that the actuating motive in this was an unselfish and patriotic desire to leave General McClellan untrammeled liberty of action, it is questionable whether it will not at the same time condemn the President's surrender of his own convictions.

But while General McClellan was making his preparations for the withdrawal of his army to Annapolis, he was saved all further trouble on this head by a movement on the part of the Confederates, no less startling than their retirement from their fortified position at Manassas and on the Potomac.

The withdrawal of the rebels from the line of Manassas, Centreville, and the lower Potomac began in February, was completed on the 8th of March, and became known to General McClellan and the Cabinet on the following day. The action taken by McClellan on this event was most extraordinary. In place of sending a light movable column to take up a prompt pursuit of the rebels, with the view of harassing their rear, he waited till *two days* after their definite withdrawal, and then instituted a general movement of the whole army, not with any adequate military view, and with no purpose of attempting to make up with the rebels, but, as he says, for the purpose of giving the troops "an opportunity to gain some experience on the march and bivouac *preparatory* to the campaign"—a kind of education of which, truly, they stood in great need.*

To any commander not hopelessly wedded to a preconceived idea, the withdrawal of the rebels from Manassas behind the Rapidan, before a single man had been shipped for the new base, would have suggested the wisdom and even the *necessity* of a change of plan. All the conditions under which the purpose of a transfer of the army to Urbana or the Peninsula was formed were changed by that event. The cardinal conception in making a flank movement by water was the hope which General McClellan entertained of being able to reach a point on the line of retreat of the rebels or to reach the front of Richmond before they could*—circumstances under which they would doubtless have given battle with great disadvantage.

The move of the enemy ought to have suggested to General McClellan that, whatever their purpose was, it was next to certain that they would be in force to meet him at whatever point of the coast he might choose to land. It should have suggested to him that all opportunity of making an offensive *manœuvre* was now at end, and that all he could now hope to do was to make a *transfer* of base. It suggested to him none of these things. It simply suggested to him to change the proposed coast expedition. To make Urbana, on the Rappahannock, after the rebels had retired behind that river, was out of the question, for if he might hope, under cover of the navy, to effect a landing, it would certainly not be possible for him to debouch from his point of debarkation. Under these circumstances the line

* The Prince de Joinville calls this movement to Manassas and back again "a promenade"—a good name for it, but the most senseless and aimless "promenade" ever conceived by a general in the midst of actual war. The "promenade" gave the soldiers an opportunity of seeing for themselves the pitiful obstacles of quaker guns and one-horse unarmed earthworks that had so long affrighted the soul of their general, though the experience we are sure, did not come home to those brave men without profound mortification and disgust.

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of the Peninsula—which he had before spoken of as one promising "less celerity and brilliancy of result," and only to be adopted in case "the worst came to the worst"—remained; and this he immediately chose.

But I shall show that this decision was made under circumstances that brought him into direct conflict with the President's most explicit orders touching the safety of Washington, and in palpable and most inexplicable violation of the conditions which the council of corps commanders adjudged essential to any movement by the line of the Peninsula. I shall further show that this decision forms the initial point of all his subsequent disasters in that hapless campaign.

VI.

McCLELLAN'S GRIEVANCE—THE DETACHMENT OF McDOWELL'S CORPS.

While Mr. Lincoln was disposed to waive his judgment with regard to the strategic merits of the two plans of advance on the enemy, he by no means felt at liberty to permit General McClellan to proceed in the execution of his movement by water without placing him under such conditions as should remove as much as possible the danger of an assault upon the capital by the enemy. And yet even here he did not undertake to decide as a military man, upon the force which might be necessary for the safety of Washington, but referred that question to the concurrent opinion of General McClellan and the four Generals in command of the four army corps into which the Army of the Potomac had been divided, simply stipulating that no change of base of the Army of the Potomac should be made without leaving such a force in and about Washington as should leave the Capital entirely secure, not merely in the opinion of General McClellan himself, *but in the opinion also of all the four Generals in command of the four army corps constituting the army.** This obliged him to hold a conference with these commanders, in the course of which they consented to the proposed movement by the Peninsula *on certain specific conditions*, to which I invite the particular attention of the reader. They are as follows—to wit:

1st. That the enemy's vessel *Merrimac* can be neutralized.
2d. That the means of transportation, sufficient for an immediate transfer of the force to its new base, can be ready at Washington and Alexandria to move down the Potomac; and
3. That a naval auxiliary force can be had to silence, or aid in silencing, the enemy's batteries on York River.
9th. That the force be left to cover Washington shall be such as to give an entire feeling of security for its safety from menace. (Unanimous.)
II. If the foregoing cannot be, the army should then be moved against the enemy, behind the Rappahannock, at the earliest possible moment, and the means for constructing bridges, repairing railroads and stocking them with materials sufficient for supplying the army, should at once be collected for both the Orange and Alexandria and Aquia and Richmond Railroads. (Unanimous.)
N. B. That with the forts on the right bank of the Potomac fully garrisoned, and those on the left bank occupied, a covering force, in front of the Virginia line of 25,000 men would suffice. (Keyes, Heintzelman and McDowell.) A total of 40,000 men for the defence of the city would suffice. (Sumner.)

In the interpretation of these opinions of the corps commanders, it must necessarily be supposed that the three Generals who concurred in opinion, intended that all the fortifications around Washington should be "manned" or "occupied," and that, over and above this, there should be a distinct unit of force capable of being moved, of twenty-five thousand men. As three of the Generals concurred in this opinion the opinion of the fourth may be thrown out of view, although it is not certain whether his opinion was intended to apply to a movable force over and above the garrisons, or to include the garrisons in his estimates of forty thousand men.

It is evident that the opinion of the three agreeing Generals was for McClellan the regulating opinion, with which he was bound to comply in carrying out the order of the President.

Now it is remarkable that, in October, when he contemplated a forward movement, he estimated the force necessary to be left in and about Washington, at thirty-five thousand men; and this, be it observed, when the proposed movement contemplated the presence of the main body of the army in front of the Capital, available in its protection and defence. If this force of thirty-five thousand men was deemed necessary by General McClellan, as the proper garrison of Washington, when the whole army was expected to be engaged in front of the Capital, much more would this force be necessary when the proposed movement looked to the removal of the main body of the army to the Peninsula, far beyond the possibility of being imme-

* President's General War No. 3, Report, p. 58.

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diately available for the defence of Washington, should the movements of the enemy endanger the Capital.

The conclusion is irresistible, therefore, that General McClellan was bound by the President's order to leave, as the garrison of the forts around Washington, not less than thirty-five thousand men; and over and above this a movable unit of force, or, in other words, an army of twenty-five thousand men, without taking into consideration the troops necessary for the defence of Baltimore or Harper's Ferry, or the guards along the Potomac, both above and below Washington; for the garrisons necessary for these places were all estimated for separately in his report of October, 1861.

It is plain from this statement, the verity of which is matter of official record, that when General McClellan received the order of the 8th of March, and had obtained the opinion of the four Generals, as just stated, *his first duty was to comply with the President's order as a condition prior to issuing any order himself in furtherance of his plan of a campaign on the Peninsula.* He should first have designated the troops necessary for the security of Washington, not according to his own individual judgment, but in conformity with the opinions of the four Generals, or of the three which concurred in opinion. His next point of duty was to consider whether his remaining force, after deducting the force designated for the security of Washington, would be such as to justify him in undertaking a campaign by his proposed line: and if he thought it was not, *it was his plain duty to represent the case to the President before giving any orders, having in view his proposed campaign.*

If General McClellan had taken this course, which both candor and duty required, he would have been spared the painful position of being in the wrong in the conflict which ensued, consequent on the necessity which his conduct had devolved upon the President, of making good his own orders, after General McClellan left Washington for the Peninsula, for it was not until *after* his departure that the President became acquainted with the fact that, should McClellan's orders be carried out, his own express orders would be disobeyed: that is, Washington, or the fortifications around it, would not be manned as required, in the opinion of the three Generals, nor would there be a covering army of twenty-five thousand men, as required by the same opinion. On the contrary, it was discovered that the amount of force left in and about Washington, and in front of it, at Warrenton and at other points, *fell short of twenty thousand men*, most of them being new troops, and though not disorganized, they were by no means organized, as was clearly set forth in official statements, and the force fell short numerically of that which he was required to leave by some forty thousand men!*

Not, as I have said, till after General McClellan's departure did the consequence of his disingenuous conduct, which left the Capital of the nation in a condition almost to be taken by a single *coup de main*, become apparent. It then became the President's imperative duty to take measures to secure the end which General McClellan had so grossly neglected, and he did so in the following order:

ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE, April 4, 1862.

By direction of the President, General McDowell's army corps has been detached from the force under your immediate command, and the General is ordered to report to the Secretary of War. Letter by mail.

L. THOMAS, Adjutant-General.

General McClellan.

If the exposition already given has the force and the truth, and the force of truth which I think belong to it, it will have been made apparent that it was General McClellan's own neglect of the command of the President, embodying the opinions of the Corps Commanders, that drew upon him the consequences, whatever they were, of the above order for the detention of McDowell's Corps—an order which was issued for no other reason than because General McClellan had failed in his duty, and thereby, in the judgment of all men, the facts being known, was precluded from all right of comment upon the President's order, and he himself must be held responsible for whatever consequences resulted from that order.

I state this simply to establish the principle in the case; but I shall, in the sequel, demonstrate that the consequences of McDowell's detention were by no means as important as General McClellan is disposed to allege, because, of the three divisions of McDowell's Corps Franklin's was sent to him immediately, and McCall's

* If General McClellan made the full and fair report of all the transactions of this period which a decent respect for the truth of history demands, he would have inserted at this point the report the General Wadsworth, Military Governor of Washington, on the strength and condition of the force left for the defence of the Capital—a document which was certainly accessible to him. It will be found at p. 316 (Vol. 1) of the Report on the Conduct of the War.

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in ample time to participate in the battles before Richmond; I shall demonstrate that, had McDowel's entire Corps been sent to him at the time that Franklin's division was forwarded, General McClellan could have made no use of it, for reasons which will appear at the proper time; and I shall demonstrate that McDowell's force at Fredericksburgh was quite as useful to General McClellan as it would have been if sent to him, since its presence threatening Richmond called off an equal portion of the enemy's force, which he would otherwise have had in his front.

Another point must here be explained, having some connection in General McClellan's mind, with the action of the President in the detention of McDowell's Corps, and it is this: There was among the troops in front of Washington, constituting a portion of the Army of the Potomac, a dvision of about eleven thousand men, under the command of General Blenker. Shortly before the departure of General McClellan for the Peninsula, the President had a personal interview with him, in which he expressed his desire to send that division to what was called the Mountain Department, in Middle Virginia, with the view of enabling General Fremont to move a co-operating column in conjunction with the advance of the army of the Potomac. General McClellan was opposed to the movement of that division, but finally acquiesced in it. In his allusion to this interview with the President, General McClellan states that the President assured him no further reduction of his army destined for the Peninsula should be made; and he then refers to the order detaining McDowell's Corps as a violation of the expressed promise made by the President.

"The President," says he, "having promised, in an interview following his order of March 31, withdrawing Blenker's division of 10,000 men from my command, that nothing of the sort should be repeated—that I might rest assured that the campaign should proceed, with no further deductions from the force upon which its operations had been planned, *I may confess to having been shocked at this order*," etc.*

In this "fine frenzy" there is a sad want of ingenuous statement; for General McClellan knew, he could not but have known, that the promise referred to must have been made by the President, *with the implicit understanding that his own orders touching the security of Washington would be carried out.* The President placed too much reliance upon General McClellan's sense of duty and propriety to intimate a doubt as to his faithful obedience to his very pointed and written orders, looking to the security of the capital. Under these circumstances General McClellan had no right to appeal to the promise of the President, except in terms of humility for the attempt to practice a deception upon the high functionary who made it, whose relations to the Commander of the Army of the Potomac was necessarily of so confidential a character as to make the utmost candor on the part of the subordinate a duty of the first importance; for it cannot be expected of the Chief Magistrate of a great people to watch with jealous suspicion the chief officers in command of his armies, lest they should deal covertly with him in their execution of his proper orders. If an evasion of duty is an offence of the most shameful character in any subordinate towards his superior, utterly subversive of all discipline in an army, and destructive of its efficiency, much more is this a crime of the first magnitude in a general officer, on whose unity of action with the purposes of his superior the success of an army almost entirely depends.

I now proceed to the consideration of the other condition, the fulfillment of which was, in the opinion of the Corps Commanders, an essential prior to any movement by the line of the Peninsula. It is the following terms, to wit: "That the enemy's vessel, the *Merrimac*, can be nutralized." On this point the opinion of the Corps Commanders was *unanimous.*

It is hardly conceivable how General McClellan could disregard the warning of his four Generals on this point, and undertake his expedition in spite of the knowledge which he must himself have had of the power of the *Merrimac.*† It is true that General McClellan drew from Commodore Goldsborough a declaration that he could *neutralize* the *Merrimac.* But this opinion went no further, as General McClellan ought to have known, that an assurance that, with the aid of the *Monitor*, and of his other naval vessels, he could prevent the *Merrimac* from leaving Elizabeth River, or, at all events, prevent her passing by Fortress Monroe into Chesapeake Bay.

But in order to do this, that is, in order to "neutralize" the *Merrimac*, General McClellan must have known *that the power of Commodore Goldsborough was itself neutralized by the Merrimac*; so that it was impossible for the navy at Fortress Mon-

* Report p. 56.

† The written instructions of the confederate navy department to the commanders of the Merrimac show that he was under orders to pass out beyond Fortress Monroe and destroy McClellan's water transportation in Chesapeake Bay.

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roe to give General McClellan any effectual aid, either on the James or York rivers, the presence of the navy, as just intimated, being necessary to watch the *Merrimac*. It is important to understand fully this state of things, because General McClellan complains, in his Report, of the want of assistance from the navy, when, in point of fact, he had no right to count upon it, and would have had no right even if his four Generals had not warned him of the dangerous power of the *Merrimac*. The navy was doing all it possibly could do in covering his water line of communications, and had no force left with which to perform any other work. This he ought to have known and no doubt he did know it, and hence I say his complaints on this head are not ingenous. They are the resort and the after-thought of a defeated General, whose failure was due to himself; but who has sought in this so-called "Report" to throw the responsibility upon others.

The result of this reasoning is, I think, to show that not one of the conditions defined by the council of Corps Commanders as essentials, prior to the adoption of the Peninsula route, was complied with by General McClellan. He neither left Washington secure, nor secured the neutralization of the *Merrimac*, nor secured the co-operation of the navy. In absence of these requirements, his plain duty was the adoption of the other alternative agreed upon by the Corps Commanders in the following terms: "If the foregoing cannot be, *the army should then be moved against the enemy behind the Rappahannock at the earliest possible moment.*" But this General McClellan did not do. He had *determined* to move the army to the Peninsula, and in doing so, he took upon himself the responsibility of all the results that grew out of his disobedience of orders.

Yet you will presently see him turning round and with incredible effrontery charging bad faith and the blame of his failures on those he had thus grossly deceived. And from that day to this he and his following have made the withholding of McDowell's corps his great grievance—the *gravamen* of all their charges against the Administration—the convenient pack-horse on which to place that burden of defeat that will bear him down to a historic infamy!

VII.

"A PICKAXE AND A SPADE, A SPADE!"

There is now, I suppose, not the shadow of a doubt that had the Army of the Potomac been simply allowed to *walk* on up the Peninsula, it would have been able to walk *over* all the force which General Magruder had to oppose it. It is now *known* how contemptible that force was. General Magruder's official report* of his operations on the Peninsula shows that his whole army consisted of eleven thousand men; of these, six thousand were useless to him, being placed in garrison at Gloucester Point, Mulberry Island, etc. "So that it will be seen," adds he, "that the balance of the line, embracing a length of thirteen miles, was defended by about *five thousand men.*" What is now a matter of certainty was then a matter of shrewd conjecture. General Wool, whose position at Fortress Monroe gave him every possible information regarding the enemy, repeatedly represented to General McClellan how trifling the rebel force was and begged him to push on before the rebels should have time to concentrate. Disposing his feeble force with admirable skill, moving it about from point to point, and putting forth the wiles and strategems of war he succeeded in so frightening General McClellan that, after a single reconnoissance, he sat down to—*dig*. "To my utter surprise," says General Magruder, "he permitted day after day to elapse without an assault. In a few days the object of his delay was apparent. In every direction, in front of our lines, through the intervening woods, and along the open fields, *earthworks began to appear.*" Of similar tenor is the conversation reported by Col. Fremantle, of the Coldstream Guards, who met General Magruder in Texas last sumner.† "He (Magruder) told me," he says, "the different dodges he had resorted to, to blind and deceive McClellan as to his strength; and he spoke of the intense relief and amusement with which he at length saw that General, with his magnificent army, *begin to break ground before miserable earthworks defended only by* 8,000 *men.*"

Grimly amusing though the retrospect of such a spectacle is, it involves a great deal that is much too humiliating to permit our entirely appreciating it. Shirking the duty of moving on the rebels at Manassas, General McClellan sought the Peninsula with the express view of making a "rapid and brilliant" campaign. His first measure in execution of this campaign is to sit down before the

* Confederate Reports of Battles, page 557. † Three Months in the Southern States.

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five thousand rebels present to dispute his progress. All that can possibly save this from being hereafter esteemed a bit of monstrous burlesque, is that it is vouched for by the irrefragable evidence of history!

If the defensive line which the rebels had constructed across the Isthmus, from Yorktown along the line of the Warwick, was really a position of the enormous strength claimed by General McClellan, I can only say that he should have taken this element into account when he determined on his plan of campaign. It is a lame and impotant excuse for him to put forth that he did not know the rebels had a fortified position on the Peninsula, that he was wholly ignorant of the nature of the topography, that he was not aware that the Warwick river ran in the direction it does, and that he found the roads in a horrible condition. He was repeatedly forewarned that he would find fortifications on the Peninsula just as well as at Manassas; but with that extraordinary levity of mind that characterizes him, he insisted on seeing all rose-colored in the distance, and, exemplifying perfectly the Latin saying, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, the less he knew of the nature of the theatre of war he was about to seek (and he after confessed it was an unknown region to him) the more allurements it had for him.

But without denying that the position which the rebels held across the Isthmus was one *naturally* strong, I deny utterly and altogether that that it presented anything which need have been any considerable obstacle to the advance of the overwhelming numbers of the Army of the Potomac. The line held by the rebels —the general line of the Warwick, which heads within a mile of Yorktown—was defended by a series of detached redoubts connected by rifle-pits, and it was not less than thirteen miles in extent. Now, all experience proves that a line so extended is only formidable when the works are fully manned, and there is present, beside, a moveable force, capable of rapid concentration at any point the enemy may assail. The very length of such a line becomes its weakness; there must be some point at which it can be forced; and this, once done, the works become a disadvantage, rather than a defence.*

On the point of the absolute necessity devolving upon McClellan to assault the works at Yorktown, the moment he reached and reconnoitered them, there is, indeed, no room for argument. Any one who will inspect the map will see the readiness with which the line of the Warwick might have been forced, and, this once done, Yorktown was *turned*. And this is the proper place to mention an incident touching the true details of which General McClellan is as reticent as he always is touching anything which in the smallest degree tells against himself. One of the division commanders occupying a point where he knew he could force the enemy's line, sent a portion of his command, chiefly Vermont troops, to cross a dam which the rebels had constructed, and assault their position. This they did, and gallantly advancing under heavy fire, actually took possession of the rebel works. But this was all contrary to General McClellan's favorite system of regular approaches, and would have proved that the President's recommendation to pierce the enemy's line, instead of being "simple folly," as McClellan pronounced it, was the highest wisdom. It must have been for this reason—for there is no other to be found—that the brave fellows who had been guilty of this brilliant irregularity, were left utterly without support, and were finally forced to fall back with serious loss! I suppose there is but one man in the world who will not now admit that the "folly" in the siege of Yorktown rested, as it so often does, exclusively where the timidity belonged—and that man is General McClellan. And if it will add anything to the completeness of this demonstration to say that the rebels never *expected* to hold Yorktown, we have their own testimony to that effect. Mugruder rightly describes the impression General McClellan's conduct produced when he speaks of the "intense amusement and delight with which he at length saw that general begin to break ground before miserable earthworks defended by a feeble force of eight thousand men."

But if the rebel force was feeble at the outset and not in condition to offer any serious resistance to an even moderately vigorous attack, it was quite certain that it would not long be allowed to remain so. The enemy, finding unexpectedly that they could hold the Army of the Potomac in check until a secondary defensive line nearer Richmond could be prepared, would have shown an inbecility which they have never displayed, had they not done so. The high probability that they

* Military history presents no more formidable fortified lines than those of Mehaigne and Bouchain, and yet Marlborough forced these, though defended by a superior force; and if this could be done in the case of positions held by a superior force, what shall we say of a line held by five thousand against over a hundred thousand. The comparison, in fact, is as ludicrous as it would be to compare the one general with the other—I mean, of course, a Marlborough with a McClellan.

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would both reason and act in this way seems to have been duly appreciated by the President, who communicated this impression to General McClellan in numerous dispatches, of which the following of April 6th, is a sample: "You now have over one hundred thousand troops with you, independently of General Wool's command. I think you had better break the enemy's line from Yorktown to Warwick river at once. They will probably use time as advantageously you can." So again, three days afterward: "By delay, the enemy will relatively gain upon you; that is, he will gain faster by fortifications and reinforcements, than you can by reinforcements alone." Never was utterance more prophetic; for, says General Magruder, in his official report: "Through the energetic action of the (Confederate) government, *reinforcements* began to pour in, and each hour the Army of the Peninsula *grew stronger and stronger until anxiety passed from my mind as to the result of an attack upon us.*" With these facts, it is submitted to the reader whether we are not justified in connecting by the closest logical bond of antecedent and consequent this fatal delay and all the disastrous results of the campaign on the Peninsula?

At length, after a month of delay, the rebels, whether ashamed of themselves at putting the grand Army of the Potomac to such unnecessary trouble, or because the position of McDowell'corps at Fredericksburg became too serious a menace to Richmond, withdrew from Yorktown as secretly as they had withdrawn from Manassas. General McClellan had consumed many weeks, including the whole month of April, in preparing to breach the fort at Yorktown. It is impossible to say how many weeks more he would have gone on digging and hauling, and it is a matter of record that he had just sent a request that the heavy siege guns in the fortifications for the defence of Washington *should be taken out of their works and shipped to him*, when, at length, the day after the withdrawal of the rebels, he "discovered" they had gone! Coming into possession of the deserted position, he immediately asked if he might inscribe "Yorktown" on his banners, and telegraphed a dispatch which he has forgotten to reproduce, to the effect that he would "push the enemy to the wall." I need hardly remark that this "wall" was never found; and we were left to exclaim with Pyramus:

> "Thou wall! O, wall! O, sweet and lovely wall,
> Show me thy chink to blink through with mine eyne."

We shall presently follow General McClellan in his subsequent movements on the Peninsula; but before dismissing the consideration of the siege of Yorktown, we must remark, in a word, that we find ourselves unable to accord to that siege the admiration which General McClellan challenges for it. We are requested to admire the thirty or forty miles of corduroy road constructed by his army, the miles of trenches and rifle pits opened, and the huge batteries placed, none of which, by the way, was ever allowed to open its fire. But we could admire the corduroy road more, were it not, according to General McClellan's own statement, a mere piece of supererogation—the roads in that region being "*passable at all seasons of the year.*" We could admire the colossal digging and delving more, could we shut out the ghastly vision of the thousands of lives lost by the epidemics of the region into which our army had been led and the useless servitude to which it had been condemned, or push aside the spectacle of those brave fellows digging at once a double ditch—a grave as well as a trench. We could admire more the profiles of his bastions and his batteries, did they not irresistibly present themselves to our imagination as huge monuments of the folly of a man who, seeking the Peninsula to execute a strategically offensive campaign, sat down, at the first show of resistance, to a feeble tactical defensive.

VIII.

THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN.

It now stands historically determined that at the time the Army of the Potomac landed upon the Peninsula, the rebel cause had reached its lowest ebb. The splendid victories won by the Union armies in the West—armies whose ardor even the McClellan policy, while it ruled, had not been able to restrain, and which, when once freed from that incubus, sprang forth into glorious activity—had carried discomfiture and demoralization to the rebel ranks, terror and dismay to the whole population, and fearful forebodings to the souls of the guilty leaders.

And while this was true of the rebel cause and the rebel armies generally, these influences were also powerfully felt by the rebel army in Virginia. It must be remembered that this was before the passage even of the first Conscription Act, and while the rebel army was suffering from the excessively defective military sys-

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tem under which the "Provisional Army" was organized. Its Winter at Manassas had greatly reduced it by disease and expiration of the term of service of the one year troops, and there is the best evidence to show that it effected its withdrawal from Manassas and Centreville in a condition of very great demoralization. Under these circumstances, there is hardly the shadow of a doubt that, had the rebels been promptly followed up after their retreat behind the Rappahannock, our army would have entered Richmond on the heels of a routed and dissolving mob, and taken possession of the Capital which the rebel leaders then expected to abandon.

In this state of facts, the historian finds himself brought face to face with the puzzling problem of determining how it happens that, in the words of Gen. BARNARD, (see Report of Engineer Operations,) "the date of the iniation of the campaign of this magnificent Army of the Potomac was the date of the resuscitation of the rebel cause, which seemed to grow strong *pari passu* with the slow progress of its operations!"

What the first favoring influence was, we need be at no loss to determine. The unexpected delay of the whole month of April before Yorktown—the military strength of which was so ludicrously inadequate to have arrested the march of our army, that it was long before the rebels would believe the evidence of their own eyes that McCLELLAN had actually called a halt—gave the rebels ample time to look about them, to form their plans and to set on foot their execution. The first fruit of this was the Conscription Law, which, let it be observed, was passed by the Confederate Congress at Richmond on the 16th day of April, in the midst of McCLELLAN's tragi-comedy of the spade before Yorktown; and this was immediately followed by the re organization of the Confederate army. Moreover the bitter manner in which the defeats of the West brought home to the leaders the military maxim that in attempting to cover everything one covers nothing, had taught them the policy of *concentration*, and they speedily began its application in Virginia.

The effect of these measures was, of course, not immediate; but Gen. McCLELLAN delayed long enough at various points to permit their full development. Faulty in strategy though the transfer of the army to the Peninsula must be considered —faulty as involving a necessary division of force and an enormous waste of time, without eliminating or diminishing any of the difficulties of the direct advance, but, on the contrary exaggerating them all—nevertheless, considering the low ebb to which the rebel fortunes had sunk, and the weak and demoralized condition of the rebel army in Virginia, at the initiation of the campaign on the Peninsula, we are warranted by the facts in saying that a vigorous advance fron Fortress Monroe would have brought the Union army into position to fight a battle for the possession of Richmond, with the chances of success decidedly on our side. This might again have been possible, a month later, after the battle of Williamsburg. It might still have been possible another month later on the heels of Fair Oaks. But it was reserved for Gen. McCLELLAN, by a display of timidity and indisposition to act amounting absolutely to disease, to weary and wear out the patience of Fortune till at length she ceased to present any more golden opportunities. What was possible to us in April, was no longer possible in August, and the force which, *as we now know*, had abandoned Yorktown without plans of future action, and which was *driven* out of Williamsburg was able three months afterwards—thanks to McCLELLAN's considerate delays—to assume the offensive and throw his army pell-mell back in disastrous retreat on the James.

But I anticipate. On the "discovery" of the withdrawal of the rebels on the morning of the 6th of May, Gen. STONEMAN, with his cavalry Corps and four batteries of horse artillery, was sent in pursuit. He was followed by HOOKER's Division of HEINTZELMAN's Corps. Subsequently the divisions of KEARNEY, COUCH, and CASEY (of SUMNER's Corps) were sent forward. STONEMAN came up with the enemy's rear-guard at Williamsburg, where a defensive line had been thrown up, which, however, it is evident, JOHNSTON was not minded to hold, since his whole army had passed *beyond* Williamsburg. It was therefore, simply for the purpose of securing the safe withdrawal of the trains that the rebel rear turned sharply on STONEMAN at Williamsburg; and, it being found that Union infantry supports were coming up, LONGSTREET's division was actually ordered *back* to that point. It was between his command and the divisions of SUMNER's and HEINTZELMAN's corps that, on the following day, the crude, ill-planned, unnecessary, but, for us, bloody encounter, which figures in history as the battle of Williamsburg, took place.

Gen. McCLELLAN, in his Report, skims this affair in a few vague touches—a fact that might be accounted for from the circumstances that, not having been person-

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ally present at this his first battle he could know nothing of it from his own knowledge, were it not for the other circumstance, that there are on record dispatches revealing, on the part of Gen. McClellan, motives and moods of mind totally at variance with the representations of his Report. I do not affirm that the fact of their being extremely damaging to his military pretensions could have anothing to do with their omission. I simply submit to the consideration of candid minds to determine what *is* the real motive of a historical deficit otherwise so unaccountable.

Gen. McClellan does not mention, when speaking of the column he "immediately" sent in pursuit of the enemy, that, had he been left to the motions of his own hesitating and cautious spirit, no column ever would had been sent in pursuit at all. It was only after the repeated and united solicitations of several of the commanders had at length succeeded in elevating his mettle up to the point of action, that the consented to a force being sent in pursuit, the battle of Williamsburg.

When, too, it was sent, it was under circumstances that made the horrible confusion and disorder that reigned at Williamsburg perfectly inevitable.

While Gen. McClellan had remained behind at Yorktown, for the purpose, as he says, of "completing the preparations forthe departure of Gen. Franklin's and other troops to West Point by water"— a task which, under the circumstances, that is, considering that Gen. Franlin's Division had remained on shipboard ever since it arrived, for the very good reason that, spite of Gen. McClellan's calls for reinforcements, *he could not find room on the Peninsula to place what he had*, and that Franklin's movement was a mere diversion and not the main business on hand, might surely have been entrusted to the General who was to command it. About noon of Monday the Prince de Joinville and Gen. Sprague went down to Yorktown, to induce Gen. McClellan to come up and take charge of operations which were going so badly for us. When told the condition of affairs in front, Gen. McClellan remarked that he had supposed "those in front could attend to that little matter." After some time, however, he started from Yorktown, reached the vicinity of Williamsburg, just at the close of the battle, and for the first time came face to face with the actual aspect of tha problem there presented.

Now, if one looks into Gen. McClellan's so-called "Report," with a view to discover what purpose he then and there formed in face of the state of facts at Williamsburg, he will look in vain. But it happens that there *are* dispatches in existence which *do* photograph Gen. McClellan's mind at this period, and as it is my aim to pierce to the historical truth underlying the veneer which he has spread over these transactions, I will tax the patience of the reader so far as to follow with some minuteness the dissection of one of Gen. McClellan's *unpublished* telegrams.

When, toward nightfall, Gen. McClellan arrived before Williamsburg, the enemy still held his position there. The troops in the front had been fighting. within hearing of McClellan during the entire day, but not within his personal supervision, and he was, for the most part, ignorant of the true state of affairs. He thought that the enemy had a securely intrenched position at Williamsburg, and had thus opposed his further advance at that time *and he determined to lose time before Williamsburg, just as he had done at Yorktown*, This is sufficiently apparent from the following telegram of May 5, which, notwithstanding its great historical importance, Gen. McClellan has *not* seen fit to re-produce:

Bivouac in Front of Williamsburgh,
May 5—10 P. M.

After arranging for movement up York river, I was urgenly sent for here. I find Joe Johnston in front of me in strong force—*probably greater, a good deal, than my own*, and very strongly intrenched. Hancock has taken two redoubts, and repulsed Early's brigade by a real charge of the bayonet, taking 1 colonel and 150 prisoners, killing at least two colonels and as many lieutenant-colonels, and many privates. His conduct was brilliant in the extreme. I do not know our exact loss, but fear Hooker has lost considerably on our left. *I learn from prisoners that they intend disputing every step to Richmond. I shall run the risk of at least holding them in check here, while I resume the original plan. My entire force is, undoubtedly, considerably inferior to that of the rebels, who still fight well; but I will do all I can with the force at my disposal.*

G. B. McCLELLAN.
Major General Commanding.

Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, *Secretary of War.*

This telegram certainly contains some very extraordinary features, remarkably illustrative of the peculiar genius of General McClellan.

He had been "urgently sent for" as if heavy firing in his front during the day had not been urgently calling him forward from the moment he heard it, without waiting for a summons by special messengers.

Hancock had made a "real charge with the bayonet," as if to charge the enemy with the bayonet was something surprising to the last degree, and not to be looked for from any portion of his army.

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He "fears that Hooker has lost considerably," because he knew, but knew very little more, that Hooker had been under heavy fire during several hours of the day, while he was superintending the movement of Franklin's division (of McDowell's corps) up York river.

Having found his advance checked at Williamsburg, he very gravely informs the Secretary of War that he "*will run the risk of at least holding them in check,*" while what? Why, being checked himself, he will run the risk of holding the enemy in check "while he resumes his original plan"—an indefinite expression, which may refer to either of two plans, that of turning Gloucester, or that of employing regular siege operations, such as he had employed before Yorktown.*

His entire force he represents as "undoubtedly considerably inferior to that of the rebels—a second allusion in the same telegram to an opinion which all the circumstances, even at the time, showed to be unfounded, the enemy having just then precipitately fled from Yorktown, and having been driven immediately afterward by "a real charge with the bayonet"—certainly no signs of superiority on their part.

He says that the enemy "still fight well, although the fighting at Williamsburgh, that very day, was the first that his army had seriously encountered since General McClellan had been in command of it.

And, finally, he concludes the telegram by an evident allusion to the McDowell subject of complaint, assuring the Secretary of War that he "will do all he can with the force at his disposal"—language indicating very great, if not extreme, despondency, fearfully foreboding the disasters of a campaign just commenced.

This telegram was written at 10 o'clock on the evening of the 5th of May, in which we see, as just intimated, that General McClellan speaks of holding the enemy in check at Williamsburgh; while, in fact, the enemy, as he then thought, had not only checked *his* advance, but was in position behind "strong intrenchments," as he calls them, to hold him in check; and he deliberately reports his purpose of resuming his original plan, the execution of which would have required time, instead of breaking through the enemy's lines.

But what was the true state of the case? This may be seen by the telegram of the next morning, dated at Williamsburgh, and addressed to the Secretary of War.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF POTOMAC,
WILLIAMSBURG, Va., May 6.

I have the pleasure to announce the occupation of this place as the result of the hard-fought action of yesterday. The effect of Hancock's brilliant engagement yesterday afternoon was to turn the left of their line of works. He was strongly reinforced, and the enemy abandoned the entire position during the night, leaving all his sick and wounded in our hands. The victory is complete. * * * Am I authorized to follow the example of other generals, and direct the names of battles to be placed on the colors of regiments? We have other battles to fight before reaching Richmond.

G. B. McCLELLAN,
Major General Commanding.

At ten o'clock during the night of the 5th of May, General McClellan formally reports that he will hold the enemy in check, when, in fact, his real opinion was that the enemy held him in check; and he quite distinctly declares his purpose of resorting to measures requiring time to obtain possession of Williamsburgh, when at the moment of writing that dispatch General Hancock, by acting in the spirit of the President's recommendation to break the enemy's lines, but without specific instructions from General McClellan, had turned their position, and had actually compassed what General McClellan despaired of accomplishing, except by slow operations. On the morning of the 6th of May General McClellan, passing suddenly from a state of extreme despondency, reports exultingly that the victory of the 5th of May "is complete."

In the state of despondency he exaggerates the strength of the enemy, plainly an excuse for his delay before Yorktown, and sets it down as "considerably greater than his own;" but says he will do all he can with the force at his disposal—when the facts show that the enemy abandoned Yorktown without waiting for an attack, and were driven out of Williamsburgh by a brilliant assault made by troops acting under an inspiration, which General McClellan's extreme "caution" could not altogether restrain.

It is by precisely such manipulation as this—that is, by constantly putting as

*And here it may be observed, that while he was employed before Yorktown, the enemy constructed his line of defence six or eight miles in the rear, where General McClellan proposed to consume more time, giving the enemy leisure for the construction of another line still further in the rear, as if he intended to aid the enemy in disputing "every step to Richmond;" the purpose of the enemy, according to information received from "prisoners."

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original motives what were really *afterthoaghts*, and by an adroit use of the *suppressio veri*—that General McClellan endeavors to give a false coloring to actions and events. But unfortunately for the success of this operation, there are too many "damned spots" that will not "out" for all his washing.

Of these there is now another that must be set forth.

When General McClellan, after the battle of Williamsburgh took up his march by the line of the York river, and thence along the railroad to the Chickahominy, instead of striking across obliquely to the James, and using that river as his line of supplies—a course rendered possible by the destruction of the *Merrimac*—we are, according to his Report, to believe that it was with extreme reluctance that he adopted this plan, to which he attempts to make it appear that he was *reduced* by the intermeddling of the authorities at Washington.

In response to General McClellan's constant calls for reinforcements it was determined that McDowell's corps, at Fredericksburgh, should move overland to make a junction either north or south of the Pamunkey, with the right of the Army of the Potomac, and co operate in the reduction of Richmond.

Informed of this determination by a dispatch from the Secretary of War, under date of May 18, General McClellan goes off in a fit of well simulated rage, and declares that this determination, and the necessity it imposed of taking the line of the York river, destroyed all his plans. "This order," he says, "rendered it *impossible* for me to use the James river as a line of operations, and *forced* me to establish our depots on the Pamunkey and to approach Richmond from the north. * * * The land movement obliged me to expose my right in order to secure the junction; and as the order for General McDowell's march was soon countermanded, I incurred great risk, of which the enemy finally took advantage *and frustrated the plan of campaign.*"

Now, is General McClellan so short of memory, or is he purposely guilty of so shameless an inconsistency, that he dares to make such an assertion as this, *when he is himself on record, under solemn oath, in a sense directly the reverse?*

In his testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War, General McClellan in reply to the specific questions—"Could not the advance on Richmond from Williamsburgh have been made with better prospect of success *by the James river than by the route pursued*, and what were the reasons for taking the route adopted?"—stated as follows:

"I do not think that the navy at that time was in a condition to make the line of the James river perfectly secure for our supplies. *The line of the Pamunkey offered greater advantages in that respect. The place was in a better position to effect a junction with any troops that might move from Washington on the Fredericksburgh line. I remember that the idea of moving on the James river was seriously discussed at that time. But the conclusion was arrived at that, under the circumstances then existing, the route actually followed was the best.*"

I leave to others the task of harmonizing these "points of mighty opposites," and of determining which is original motive and which afterthought. If they cannot be harmonized, I leave the reader to stamp with its fitting characterization this assertion of General McClellan's.

But the truth of history requires me to go farther, and to point out that it was not at Williamsburgh but at Roper's church, where the army was, *ten days previously*, that it was necessary to decide whether he would there cross the Chickahominy (undefended) and approach the James river, (then open to us by the destruction of the *Merrimac*,) or continue on the Williamsburgh road toward Richmond. The decision was made then and there, and the decision was to move by the York and Pamunkey. So that so far from its being true, as claimed by General McClellan—that the dispatch of the Secretary of War "*ordering*" him to connect by land with McDowell, obliged him to renounce a route by which, as he would now lead us to believe, he could have taken Richmond, the truth is that the choice of route was voluntarily made by General McClellan *ten days before this order he quotes was given*; and yet he has in his report the astounding assurance to complain of the order in question as subjecting him to "great risks," of which the enemy finally "took advantage" and "frustrated "the plan of campaign!"

What the enemy took advantage of—and what he would have been a fool had he *not* taken advantage of—was Gen. McClellan's own ill judged scheme of operations, by which he *gave* the Rebels an interior position between himself and the force covering Washington. Just as Gen. McDowell was about to start from Fredericksburg, with a reinforcement of forty thousand men, came the news of Jackson's raid up the Shenandoah Valley, and Gen. McDowell was ordered by the President to send first one division, then another, and then his whole force, to follow Jackson—a request which is evident from Gen. McDowell's dispatches, he complied with with

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extreme reluctance, as it, for the time being, diverted him from his proposed march to join McClellan, which he had extremely at heart.

Thus early was the order detaining McDowell's corps to cover Washington fully justified! This, as well as all the circumstances of the case, are fully set forth in a dispatch from the President, under date of May 25, in which, after giving the details of Jackson's movement and the dispositions that had been made in consequence, he concludes as follows:

"*If McDowell's force was now beyond our reach, we should be utterly helpless. Apprehension of something like this, and no unwillingness to sustain you, has always been my reason for withholding McDowell's force from you. Please understand this, and do the best you can with the force you have.*"

I submit if this language does not display, on the part of the President, a temper worthy the name of sublime, especially when we consider it was addressed to the man who, of all others, had most tried his patience—the man whose conduct, on numberless occasions, had deserved his severest displeasure—the man to whom the President had conceded unlimited means for preparing one of the most powerful armies ever raised in any country—the man who, after all, evaded by an attempted artifice, the orders of his constitutional chief, thereby exposing the capital of the nation to be sacked by the enemy, and exposing also his really grand army to defeat and danger of imminent destruction?

The countermanding of the order given to McDowell, gave McClellan what was far more valuable to him than the actual reinforcements which that General would have brought—to wit, an excuse, or the semblance of an excuse for further delays. For a long time he and his friends were able to saddle on that detention all the blame of his failures; but this shallow trick has ceased to be possible since the publication of the documents in the case; and I may add that it has ceased to be possible since the publication of Gen. McClellan's own report.

Gen. McClellan states that "the information that McDowell's corps would march from Fredricksburgh on the following Monday, (the 26th,) and that he would be under my command, *was cheering news, and I now felt that we would on his arrival be sufficiently strong to overpower the large army confronting us.*" This is simulated joy and had no being in the bosom of Gen. McClellan at the time. The fact is Gen. McClellan did not wish Gen. McDowell to join him by an overland march; he wished him to come by water on his rear, and stated at the time that *he would rather not have him at all than have him come overland!* This fact is abundantly proven by numerous dispatches, published and unpublished. Thus, under date of May 21, he writes: "I fear there is little hope McDowell can join me overland *in time for the coming battle.*" (One would suppose from this that he was going to fight a battle in ten minutes.) But if he did not think McDowell would be able to join him "in time" by an overland march of fifty miles, (an easy three or four days' march,) how could he expect him to join him in time by the water route, when, according to his experience, the transit could not have been accomplished short of a fortnight? This is iterated and reiterated day after day, and finally, in a dispatch, under date of June 14, he says, with still greater emphasis:

"It ought to be distinctly understood that McDowell and his troops are completely under my control. I received a telegraph from him requesting that McCall's Division might be placed so as to join him immediately on his arrival. That request does not breathe the proper spirit.—Whatever troops come to me must be so disposed of as to do the most good. I do not feel feel that, in such circumstances as those in which I am now placed, Gen. McDowell should wish the general interest to be sacrificed for the purpose of increasing his command. *If I cannot fully control all his troops, I want none of them, but would prefer to fight the battle with what I have, and let others be responsible for the results.*"

Now, speaking of what does and what does not "breathe the proper spirit," I would like to ask whether this astounding declaration of Gen. McClellan "breathes" exactly the "proper spirit?" According to his own repeated declarations, he was in a position in which reinforcements were absolutely essential, *and yet he prefers not to have them at all, unless he can have them by a route, coming by which they would have required thrice the length of time, and by which they would also have been put out of the possibility of offering any protection to the threatened Capital of the nation.* The only advantage his plan presented is that it would have enabled him to break up McDowell's divisions as they arrived, and assign them to the commands of his own favorites, and rid him of the man whom he had come to regard with the green eye of jealousy. I submit to the candid reader to determine whether Gen. McClellan is in a situation to throw himself back on his injured innocence, and claim for himself and his conduct such pure and elevated and unselfish and patriotic motives, or whether all these claims are not the most hollow and unmitigated pretence.

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Of events on the Chickahominy, so damning to McClellan, so humiliating to the whole country, there is neither the space nor the patience here to speak.*—Two decisive battles were fought on the Chickahominy—Fair Oaks and Gaines' Mill. They were not battles of McClellan's seeking—they were brought on by the rebels, and we are thus presented with the odd spectacle of a General seeking a special theatre of war for the purpose of making not only an offensive, but a "rapid" and "brilliant" movement, compelled each time he met the enemy to fight on the *defensive*. We have the further spectacle of a man who was constantly clamoring for reinforcements, *fighting his two chief battles, the first with one-half, the second with less than one-third his force!*

To the last we find him persisting in the demand for more troops—to the last we find him the man who was ready to

"Drink up Esile, eat a crocodile,"

doing *nothing* with what he had. "If at this instant," says he, the day after the battle of Gaines' Mill, "I could dispose of *ten thousand* fresh men, I could gain the victory to-morrow"—a statement to which we might reply that, had he not allowed Porter's corps to be slaughtered the day before, he would have had the ten thousand he there lost. But it is very remarkable that, with an enemy "two hundred thousand" strong, and behind "strong entrenchments," he should have deemed himself capable of "gaining the victory" with a feeble reinforcement of ten thousand men, which would have been no more than he had during all the time he did not "gain a victory." In fact, his victories on paper and in hypothesis, are part of the wonderful phenomena of Gen. McClellan's character.

Having lost his base, and the enemy being planted across his communications, it only remained for Gen. McClellan to beat a retreat to the James River. This act he dignified at the time by the euphenism of "change of base"—a phrase which has since then acquired a ludicrous meaning it will long to lose.

The retreat to the James, considering the bulk of the enemy was on the left bank of the Chickahominy and a long march off, was not difficult. But, notwithstanding this fact, and that the troops were put in the most obvious positions, and that in no case was Gen. McClellan present at any of the engagements of the "seven days' fight," this movement has been claimed as a master-piece of strategy—comparable, say his admirers, only to Moreau's retreat through the Black Forest. And I dare say that the credit in the one case is about as just as in the other; for Napoleon proclaims that Moreau's retreat was "the greatest blunder he ever committed."—"As the Directory," adds he, "could not give Moreau credit for a victory, *they did for a retreat, which they caused to be extolled in the highest terms;* but, instead of credit, Moreau merited the greatest censure and disgrace for it." I leave the parallel to the reader's own apprehension.

In all the battles during this retrograde movement, we have the same utter want of head—Gen. McClellan in each case being absent getting a fresh position to fall back upon. This is the first time that we have known that it is the *first* and highest duty of a Commanding General to reconnoitre positions for a retreat. "The Corps Commanders," says Gen. Heintzleman, in his testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War, "*fought their troops according to their own ideas.* We helped each other. If anybody asked for reinforcements, I sent them; if I wanted reinforcements, I sent to others. He [McClellan] was the most extraordinary man I ever saw. *I do not see how any man could leave so much to others, and be so confident that everything would go just right.*" Even at the last of the series of battles, when a defeat would have thrown his army into the James River, at Malvern, we find him, with the exception of a brief period *previous* to and at the *end* of the fight, away "on board a gunboat," and this, notwithstanding the admitted fact that the innate valor of our troops gave the enemy so decided a repulse that, if vigorously followed up, they might even then have been followed up into Richmond.

So ends the story of the strange, eventful campaign on the Peninsula—a campaign which, though ill-planned, was worse executed, and in which the utter incapacity of the Commanding General to take advantage of even such opportunities as fortune threw in his way, was most signally demonstrated. Gen. McClellan did not bring back with him such an army as he had taken away. He brought back an army demoralized, worn down by useless toil, reduced by sickness, almost unmatched in the annals of war. He found the rebel cause at the lowest ebb, and the rebel army

* A full criticism of the whole of McClellan's military conduct on the peninsula will be found in the series of articles in the N. Y. Times, reviewing McClellan's Report, by the present writer.

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demoralized and dispirited. He left one in the flood-tide of success, the morale of the other restored by the prestige of great victories.

IX.

HOW POPE GOT OUT OF HIS "SCRAPE."

If the army had sustained itself nobly throughout the sad campaign on the Peninsula, it cannot be denied that so much fruitless toil and so much disaster had impaired its *morale*, while the losses in battle and the epidemics of the region had greatly thinned its ranks. It therefore became a serious question when the army arrived at Harrison's Landing whether it should be allowed to remain or be brought away.* At first there seems to have been no other intention than to reinforce McClellan and let him try it once again. He had promised if furnished with twenty thousand men to assume the offensive and attempt a fresh advance towards Richmond. Accordingly Shield's division was sent him and other troops were about to be forwarded when he put up his request to 50,000 men, and finally demanded reinforcements "*rather much over than under* 100,000 strong." It was utterly *impossible* to furnish this number, and this reason, joined to the fact that a majority of the highest officers of the army of the Potomac counseled a withdrawal, and that a movement to effect a junction with the forces in front of Washington, now under General Pope, was essential to cover the Capital against the attack which the rebels were absolutely certain to make, and for which they were at this very time actually preparing, determined the Administration to recall the army from the Peninsula.

The order for the withdrawal of the army from the Peninsula was given by General Halleck, on the 3d of August. The point to which it was ordered was Aquia Creek, for the purpose of making a junction with the forces under Pope, on the Rappahannock. It is hardly necessary to say that after this course was determined upon the utmost possible promptitude in execution of the design was absolutely necessary, for there could be no doubt that the purpose of the rebels looking toward a movement on Washington would receive the most powerful stimulus by the knowledge of the withdrawal of the army from the Peninsula.

But instead of this, we find General McClellan sitting down to expostulation, and after he had exhausted this, we see him throwing every practical obstacle in the way of getting the army back. He urges "*the terribly depressing effect on the North* and the strong probability that it would induce foreign powers to recognize our adversaries," whereas the fact is, there was hardly an intelligent man in the North who was not looking with the most intense anxiety to the removal of the army to a position where it could be interposed between the enemy and the menaced Capital of the nation. He promises, however, if his counsel does not prevail, to "obey the order with a sad heart."

This "sadness" of his *heart* seems to have so enfeebled his *hand*, that though he was ordered to commence the removal of the army on the 3d of August, day after day passed before anything was done toward it. "It is believed," writes General Halleck to him under date of the 5th, "that it [the removal] can be done now without serious danger. *This may dot be so should there be any delay.*"

Finally, on the 10th, he received dispatches which should have stirred the most sluggish nature to activity: "*They are fighting General Pope to-day*—there must be no further delay in your movements; *that which has already occurred was nnexpected and must be satisfactorily explained.*" This only gives McClellan an opportunity to show the enormous "inherent difficulties of the movement"—difficulties which were pointed out to him before he started to take the army to the Peninsula, *but which he then made light of*—and he ends by adding: "It is not possible for any one to place this army where you wish it *in less than a month;* if Washington is in danger now *this army can scarcely arrive in time to save it!*" What a cheering person General McClellan is!

Without following these transactions through all their maddening details, suffice it ta say that it was the 20th of the month—*seventeen days* after the order for withdrawal was given—before the army was ready to embark at Yorktown, Fortress

* There is connected with this portion of McClellan's career one curious piece of history that merits a passing notice here. Readers of the Report will not have failed to have noted an extraordinary letter addressed by General McClellan to the President, from Harrison's Bar, under date of July 7, giving his "views" on the political situation. This document opens with this statement that the "*rebellion has assumed the character of a war*"—a discovery which, perhaps, explains the peace principles on which General McClellan had been operating, but which it is a misfortune he did not make at an earlier date. It then proceeds to indicate a politico-military programme of the moral suasion stamp, stating that "a declaration of radical views, especially

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Monroe and Newport's News. And with this I leave it, to find it turning up again at Alexandria, where I shall have to review a series of events, the most extraordinary, perhaps, in General McClellan's extraordinary career.

The whole rebel army was now rapidly marching northward to overwhelm Pope and precipitate itself on Washington. If Gen. McClellan's own estimate of the rebel force, at 200,000, was correct, Pope had upon him a force six times his strength, and, as it was, he certainly had upon him a force *three* or *four* times his strength. His instructions were to "stand fast" on the Rappahannock—to "fight like the devil and contest every inch of ground." In this task, he was cheered by the announcement that from Alexandria he would speedily receive heavy reinforcements, among which was the corps of Franklin, which he designed to move to Gainesville, a position which covered Manassas Junction, and watched the gaps in the Piedmont Ridge.

With the view of giving effect to this purpose, Gen. Halleck, on the morning of the 27th of August, telegraphed to McClellan, who had arrived in Alexandria the day before, and through whom all reinforcements to Pope must pass, that "Franklin's corps should march in the direction of Manassas as soon as possible." Had this order been obeyed, Jackson's forces, defeated and driven by Pope on the 27th, would have been met near Centreville the next afternoon and crushed.

Now I ask of the reader to bring all the attention and patience he can command, while I show with what fertility of device, and what prodigality of ingenuity, Gen. McClellan contrived so to arrange things that Pope should not get a man of these reinforcements; but should be left with his feeble force of less than forty thousand men to a death-grapple with the enemy that had lately defeated McClellan's once splendid army of one hundred and fifty thousand men: in other words, should be left to—I use Gen. McClellan's own choice phraseology—"*get out of his scrape.*" And I shall show that so completely successful was he that *not a single man ever reached Pope after McClellan arrived at Alexandria.*

In this *exposé* I shall take up events in their chronological order, beginning with the date of the first dispatch to McClellan with reference to the forwarding of reinforcements. I shall show what was the state of facts in front, what were the necessities of the occasion, what orders Gen. McClellan received, and how he carried them out. Let me add that I shall not draw from the testimony of Gen. Pope, nor from the overwhelming array of facts developed by the Committee on the Conduct of the War. I shall confine myself to the simple setting forth of the text of the series of telegrams that passed between headquarters and Gen. McClellan, though I shall be forced to draw from many dispatches which Gen. McClellan, for reasons best known to himself, has not seen fit to reproduce in his so-called "Report."

The 27th of August.—At 10 A. M., Gen. Halleck telegraphs McClellan:

"Franklins Corps should march in that direction [Manassas] as soon as possible."

At 10 20 Gen. McClellan replies:

"I have sent orders to Franklin to *prepare* to march, *and to repair here* [Alexandria] *in person, to inform me as to his means of transportation.*"

At noon Gen. Halleck reiterates, with emphasis, his order to Franklin to march.

"Franklin's corps should move out by forced marches, carrying three or four days provision." &c.

To this Gen. McClellan replies at 1 15 P. M.:

"Franklin's artillery have no horses, except for four guns;" and adds: "*I do not see that we have force enough in hand to form a connection with Pope, whose exact position we do not know.*"

Is it not very strange that in order that Franklin should march with his corps, Gen. McClellan should begin by calling him away *from* it? If Franklin's artillery lacked horses, why did he not *take* horses which were in abundance in Alexandria? That this was so, I shall presently establish conclusively; and I shall also show that *neither McClellan, nor Franklin, ever applied for transportation to the Quartermaster's Department, which was ready instantly to furnish it.*

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upon Slavery, *will rapidly disintegrate our present armies.*" Now, what is notable in this paper is, that *it was written in Washington before he left for his Peninsular campaign, and was intended to be issued in Richmond.* He fancied he would there be in a position to dictate terms and indicate the public policy. Not finding his expected opportunity to fire off the shot he had prepared, he took the best occasion he could find; and so, putting on a "tag" at the beginning and the end, he brought it out at Harrison's Landing. Its ineffable impudence, the haggard and untimely look it wears, and the inherent absurdity of the proposition to deal leniently with those at whose hands he had just suffered disastrous defeat, are sufficiently accounted for by the circumstances detailed.

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The 28th of August.—On the morning of the 28th, Halleck telegraphs directly *to Franklin:*

"On parting with Gen. McClellan, about 2 o'clock this morning, it was understood that you were to move with your corps to-day toward Manassas Junction, to drive the enemy from the railroad. I have just learned that the general has not returned to Alexandria. If you have not received his order, *act on this.*"

To this, at 1 P. M., McClellan, *not Franklin,* replies:

"Your dispatch to Franklin received. I have been doing all possible to hurry artillery and cavalry. The moment that Franklin can be started with a reasonable amount of artillery he shall go * * * * * * * Please see Barnard, and be sure the works toward the Chain Bridge are perfectly secure. I look upon those works, Ethan Allen and Marcy, as of the first importance"

At 3 30 P. M., Halleck impatiently telegraphs McClellan:

"*Not a moment must be lost* in pursuing as large a force as possible toward Manassas, so as to communicate with Pope *before the enemy is reinforced.*"

To this McClellan repliel at 4 40 P. M.:

"*Gen Franklin is with me here.* I will know in a few minutes the condition of artillery and cavalry. We are not yet in a condition to move—*may be by to-morrow morning.*"

At 8 40 P. M., Halleck still more imperatively telegraphs:

"There must be no further delay in moving Franklin's corps toward Manassas; *they must go to-morrow morning, ready or not ready.* If we delay too long to get ready, there will be no necessity to go at all *for Pope will either be defeated or victorious without our aid.* If there is a want of wagons, the men must carry provisions with them till the wagons can come to their relief."

To which Gen. McClellan replies at 10 P. M.:

"Your dispatch received. Franklin's corps has been ordered to march at 6 o'clock to-morrow morning. Sumner has about 14,000 infantry, without cavalry or artillery, here."

These dispatches give the history of the 28th of August. *Not one of these is published by Gen. McClellan in his Report.* They show the reiterated orders Gen. McClellan received to send reinforcements to Pope, and the imminence of the crisis that was upon that General. They show on the part of McClellan the shallow subterfuges he employed to avoid obeying these orders. In this whole series of excuses, there is but one that presents even the *show* of sebstantiallity—namely the supposed lack of transportation; but the utter baselessness of this pretence is made manifest by a dispatch of Gen. Halleck a day or two afterward, in which he says: "I learned last night (29th) that the Quartermasters Department would have given him (Franklin) plenty of transportation *if he had applied for it any time since his arrival at Alexandria.*"

The 29th of August.—At length, two whole days after the imperative order was given to Gen. McClellan to have Franklin "move out by forced marches," he is able to say, "Franklin's corps is in motion." To be sure, Gen. McClellan confesses that his repeated promises throughout the two previous days to send Franklin forward were all sham, for he says; "I should not have moved him but for your pressing orders of last night." Still he is at length under way, and there is yet a possibility that he will reach Pope in time. Vain hope! He halts Franklin at Anandale and coolly telegraphs to Halleck:

"*Do you wish the movement of Franklin's corps to continue?* He is without reserve ammunition and without transportation."

Gen. Halleck must be a very mild mannered man, for he simply replies:

"*I want Frank'in's corps to move far enough to find out something about the enemy.* Perhaps he may get such information at Anandale as to prevent his going further; otherwise, he will push on toward Fairfax. Try to get something from direction of Manassas, either by telegrams or through Franklin's scouts. *Our people must move more actively, and find out where the enemy is.* I am tired of guesses."

Gen. McClellan had now exhausted all the resources of a diabolical ingenuity in order to keep Pope from receiving reinforcements. He had by this means gained two days and a half; that is, from 10 A. M. of the 27th until 3 P. M. of the 29th. He *knew* that Pope had by this time the whole rebel army upon him. He *knew* that a great battle was that very morning and afternoon going on, for the roar of the artillery came to his ears at Alexandria, where he held thirty thousand loyal Americans in the leash, while their brothers in arms were being overwhelmed. It was a crisis with McClellan, and he must either let the troops go forward to Pope or devise a new system of tactics. He could no longer pretend that he did not know where Pope was—he could no longer pretend that he did not know how far Gen. Halleck wished Franklin to advance. He was brought to the wall by Gen. Halleck's emphatic order. "*Our people must find out where the enemy is!*"

Gen. McClellan was equal to the emergency. He drops the correspondence with Halleck, and coolly indites to the President of the United States the following dis-

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patch, the most extraordinary ever penned by any man wearing a soldier's uniform. I pause for a moment to ask the reader to take in a full realizing sense of the import of the following amazing words:

"The last news I received from the direction of Manassas was from stragglers, to the effect that the enemy were evacuating Centerville and retiring towards Thoroughfare Gap. This is by no means reliable. I am clear that one of two courses should be adopted. *First*—To concentrate all our available forces to open communication with Pope. *Second—To leave Pope to get out of his scrape*, and at once to use all means to make the Capital perfectly safe. No middle course will now answer. Tell me what you wish me to do and I will do all in my power to accomolish it. I wish to know what my orders and authority are. I ask for nothing, but will obey whatever orders you give. I only ask a prompt decision, that I may at once give the necessary orders. It will not do to delay longer."

Expressive silence is the only possible comment on this astounding proposition, for the profound horror and contempt such words inspire take away all power of cool dissection. It is said that when Mr. Lincoln read this dispatch he fell back in his chair in a half fainting fit, and even at this distance of time it is hardly possible to read it without a sinking of the heart.

General McClellan in the above proposition suggests two courses. I need not say that they are substantially one and the same. *He knew that Lee's junction with Jackson was now certain*—Fitz John Porter had attended to that. In either case, therefore, Pope was perfectly certain to be left to "*get out of his scrape.*"

But what was the "scrape" out of which Pope was to get? Into what horrible indiscretion—so unwarranted that to leave him to "get out" of it was only just punishment on him—had he rushed? Will it be believed that he got into "the scrape" at the urgent instance of General McClellan, who begged Pope to make a diversion in his favor? Will it be believed that, with the loyal alacrity of a true soldier, he had, in obedience to this request, thrown himself down on the Rapidan to compel the enemy to loose his hold on the Army of the Potomac—that he received the whole weight of the rebel force precipitated upon him—that with masterly generalship he kept back that force for seventeen days, fighting in that time several large battles, in which, repeatedly successful, he gave the rebels their first taste of true punishment—that by this means he succeeded in gaining time sufficient for General McClellan to bring back his army to the defence of the Capital? Yet such are the facts which history records. Now we understand. This was the "scrape" Pope was to get out of!

The 30th of August.—I have exhausted the main action in this strange drama, but there remains an episode that should take its place in this recital. So far as the keeping back of reinforcements goes, General McClellan had done his best that Pope should not "get out of his scrape." But there remains a touch beyond this. Pope's ammunition, rations and forage were now exhausted, and he sent to Washington to procure supplies. General McClellan was to fill the orders. You shall now see how he did it.

To the request for ammmunition, General McClellan telegraphs at 1 : 10 p. m.: "*I know nothing of the calibre of Pope's artillery.*" Yet he was within two minutes telegraphic communication with the Ordnance Bureau at Washington, where he might have had full information on this point.

To the request for rations, General Franklin replies:

"I have been instructed by General McClellan to inform you that he will have all the available wagons at Alexandria loaded with rations for your troops, and all of the cars also, *as soon as you will send in a cavalry escort to Alexandria as a guard to tee train.*

I cannot better set forth this matter in its true bearings than by giving the following passage from General Pope's official report:

"About daylight of the 30th, I received a note from General Franklin, written by direction of General McClellan, informing me that rations and forage *would* be loaded into all the available wagons and cars at Alexaddria, as soon as I would send bacd a cavalry escort to guard the trains. Such a letter, when we were fighting the enemy, and Alexandria was swarming with troops, needs no comment. Bad as was the condition of our cavalry, I was in no situation to spare troops from the front, *nor could they have gone to Alexandria and returned within the time by which we must have had provisions or have fallen back in the direction of Washington; nor do I see what service cavalry could have rendered in guarding railroad trains.*"

I must let this close this exposition of the extraordinary series of transactions at Alexandria, in which I have done little else than allow official dispatches to tell their own story. I leave the reader to form his own judgment and pronounce his own verdict. But one remark remains. I have hitherto had occasion to call in question General McClellan's *capacity*. The conduct here set forth invites a question of his *loyalty*. I cannot enter General McClellan's private thought, and pluck out the "heart of his mystery." It is possible that his conduct at Alexandria was nothing more than the effect of heartless selfishness and ambition, which can lead

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up to the very door of treason without passing within. It is now certain that it was the avowed purpose of McClellan and his friends so to arrange matters as that the army should, to use their expression, "fall back into his arms" at Washington. For this end it was essential that Pope should not obtain reinforcements, for had he received the thirty thousand troops that lay idle at Alexandria, he would beyond a doubt *have beaten the rebel army.* That he should do so was manifestly not at all in General McClellan's programme.

Looking at General McClellan's conduct as it stands revealed in his own dispatches, I can only say to him, "if this be *loyalty,* make the most of it."

X.

CLOSING SCENES IN McCLELLAN'S CAREER.

If, now, after the *exposé* I have made of the conduct of General McClellan in the extraordinary series of transactions recorded in the preceeding chapter, the question be asked, why it was that, after behavior which in any other country in the world would have caused him to be court-martialed, we find that general not only NOT called to account, but presently restored to the full command of the Army of the Potomac, I frankly reply that this question must be left to history to answer. History will not fail to ask the question, but the answer will be given both with a fuller knowledge of all the facts in the case than we now possess, and under circumstances when those considerations of the public good that now put a check on our venturing on even such revelations as it is in our power to make, will no longer be in force. We can, however, anticipate the verdict in so far as to say that history will recognize that, in his action in this matter, Mr. Lincoln was moved only by the purest and most patriotic motives, and if his yielding of intellectual convictions which he must even then have formed, indicated a blameable weakness, he erred only from the excess of his unselfish anxiety for the public good, at a time when things and the thoughts of men were plunged into utter chaos and collapse.

Pope had now "got out of his scrape"—as best he could, and the army had fallen back to Washington, where the arrangements of McClellan's friends to have it "fall into his arms" were crowned with all the success they could have desired. Pope fell back to the works in front of Washington on the 2d of September; on the same, McClellan took command, and Lee, filing off the left, proceeded to do what General McClellan, in his first memorandum, had staked his military sagacity "no capable general" would do—that is, he crossed the Potomac to make his first invasion of the loyal States.

It is not my purpose to review the Maryland campaign with that fullness of detail that has characterized the analysis of the previous portion of General McClellan's career, for my aim is not so much to dissect the historical facts themselves as to dissect General McClellan's character and conduct as revealed in these facts. Now, in this regard, what remains funishes really nothing essentially new. We are presented with the same characteristics of genius and generalship which we have already discovered—the same unreadiness to move promptly and act vigorously; the same clamoring for "more troops" before advancing; the same reference to the great superiority of numbers on the part of the enemy. It is, after all, a dismal story, and has probably already tested the human stomach to its utmost limits.

In the Maryland invasion, the intentions of Lee, after striking Frederick, appear to have aimed exclusively at the capture of Harper's Ferry. His combinations for this end are now fully revealed by an order of Lee's found at Frederick, and which discloses the whole programme of operations. By this it appears that the commands of Jackson, Longstreet, McLaws, and Walker—that is, in fact, the whole rebel army with the exception of the division of D. H. Hill—were assigned parts in the capture of Harper's Ferry. The single division of D. H. Hill and part of Stuart's cavalry formed the rear guard destined to check any pursuit of McClellan, while the whole rebel force should move to the accomplishment of the end proposed.

In a military point of view this was a bold operation, and the rebel general should have been made to pay dearly for venturing upon it. And yet, if we consider that the combinations of a commander are necessarily largely influenced by his knowledge of the character of his opponent, we must admit that Lee, aware of the tardy genius of McClellan, was authorized in taking a step which, against a vigorous opponent, ought to have secured his destruction. At any rate, the event fully justified his action. McClellan, intrusted with the duty of meeting and crushing the invading army, moved out by slow and easy stages—*at an average of six miles a day*—and accommodated Lee with all the time he needed. Of course, he was able to

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accomplish his designed object—the capture of Harper's Ferry, its garrisons and stores; but connected with this, and General McClellan's responsibility for it, there are one or two circumstances that deserve more detailed examination.

There is no doubt that the moment Lee crossed the Potomac, the forces at Harper's Ferry were placed in a false position and should have been promptly withdrawn. But we find no recommendation to this effect by General McClellan during the period in which it was possible to carry it out. His first utterance on the subject is in a dispatch to General Halleck, dated "Camp near Rockville, Sept. 10," in the following terms:

"Colonel Miles is at or near Harper's Ferry, as I understand, with nine thousand troops He can do nothing where he is, but could be of great service if ordered to join me. I suggest that he be ordered to join me by the most practicable route."

Now let us consider what the result of the execution of this order would have been. Lee's instructions to Jackson, Longstreet, &c., to move to the capture of Harper's Ferry, *are dated the day previous, Sept.* 9. An order to Colonel Miles "to join him by the most practicable route," as recommended by McClellan, would, therefore, have simply brought his force into the arms of the rebel army, and Jackson would have been saved the trouble of even the semblance of investment he thought proper to make of Harper's Ferry. In this state of facts General Halleck's reply of the same day to the dispatch of McClellan is as sensible as could possibly have been given:

"There is no way for Colonel Miles to join you at present; his only chance is to defend his works till you can open communication with him."

"Till you can open communication with him;" but with a "pursuit" at the rate of six miles a day against an enemy moving at the rate of twenty, was there much chance to "open communication?" Moreover, McClellan lost the opportunity offered him of moving by the direct route to Harper's Ferry. Lee calculated that by threatening with his rear guard the passage into Pennsylvania he would draw McClellan off from the flank march which was open to him to Harper's Ferry. In this calculation he was correct, and while he was engaged with a feeble detachment of the rebel force at South Mountain, the garrison at Harper's Ferry, 12,000 strong, with all its vast military stores, on the 14th fell into the hands of Jackson. As a military tribunal has pronounced judgment on this sad affair, there is no need of going into it here; it is proper, however, to cite the conclusion of its finding, which is in the following terms:

"The commission has freely remarked on Colonel Miles, an old officer, who has been killed in the service of his country, and it cannot from any motives of delicacy refrain from censuring those in high command, when it thinks such censure deserved. The General in-Chief has testified that General McClellan, after having received orders to repel the enemy invading the State of Maryland, marched only six miles per day, on an average, when pursuing this invading army. The General-in-Chief also testifies that in his opinion General McClellan *could and should have relieved and protected Harper's Ferry, and in this opinion the commission fully concur.*"

General McClellan's dispatches of this period, carefully suppressed by him from his "Report," show that from the first step he took out of Washington in pursuit of Lee, he was haunted by those horrible visions of the fabulous legions of the enemy that we have seen constantly oppressing him. While still at Rockville, under date of the 9th September, we find him writing: "From such information as can be obtained, Jackson and Longstreet have about a hundred and ten thousand, (110,000) men of all arms near Frederick, with some cavalry this side."

The monstrosity of this estimate is readily apparent from the fact that even had the Corps of Jackson and Longstreet been at the full (40,000 men each) their united commands could only have numbered eighty thousand; but it is perfectly well known that, after the series of severe actions through which they had gone, their corps did not count one-half their complement. But General McClellan was destined to go several thousand better on this estimate. Reversing the usual maxim that

"'Tis *distance* lends enchantment to the view,"

the *nearer* McClellan approached the enemy, the vaster his proportions grew. On the 11th we find him stating that "almost the entire rebel army in Virginia, amounting to not less than 120,000 men, is in the vicinity of Frederick city;" and a day or two afterward that army had resumed its old Chickahominy proportions of "180,000 men!" Now with regard to Lee's army in Maryland, we have information more than usually precise respecting its strength. It all passed through Frederick city, where it was carefully counted, and where it was found to number, how many do you suppose? It was found to number precisely *fifty five thousand effective men!* Remember, now, that McClellan's old Peninsular army, swelled in

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Washington by a great part of the command of Pope, numbered at this time over a *hundred and twenty thousand men*—that is, that McClellan's force outnumbered the enemy's more than two to one—and you will have the proper test by which to judge of his generalship in the actions which followed.

The rear guard left by Lee at South Mountain fully succeeded in delaying the advance of McClellan until such time as Jackson and Hill had compelled the surrender of Harper's Ferry and the capitulation of the garrison. But even after arriving before Antietam Creek he had still an opportunity on the 16th of September—the day before the battle—to strike Lee before Jackson returned. This opportunity, also, he threw away. Says an English military critic, who always deals tenderly with McClellan: "Examining the proceedings of the 16th of September, by the account most favorable to the Federal leader, there can be no doubt that the extreme caution which he then displayed caused him to throw away the opportunity of crushing the enemy, which the resistance of Harper's Ferry, brief though it was, placed before him."

During that night Jackson arrived with his corps, and the next day, September 17th, when the movement of Hooker *drove* McClellan into battle, Lee had his whole force massed at Antietam. But his whole force was *doubly* outnumbered by that of McClellan. The battle was delivered without order or *ensemble*—the attacks being made feebly and in driblets. Says General Sumner, in regard to the manner of conducting the battle of Antietam:

"I have always believed that, instead of sending these troops into that action in driblets as they were sent, if General McClellan had authorized me to march these 40,000 men on the left flank o the enemy, we could not have failed to throw them right back in front of the other divisions o our army on our left—Burnside's, Franklin's, and Porter's corps. As it was, we went in, division after division, until even one of my own divisions was forced out, the other two drove the enemy and held their positions. My intention was to have proceeded entirely on by their left and move down, bringing them right in front of Burnside, Franklin and Porter.

Question. And all escape for the enemy would have been impossible?

Answer. I think so.'*

On the night of the 18th the enemy, abandoned their position, *their ammunition being exhausted*, and returned across the Potomac into Virginia, without molestation. McClellan slowly followed and took up a position along the Potomac, on the Maryland side. Lee established himself at the mouth of the valley, just south of Harper's Ferry.

If any combination of circumstances can be conceived calculated to prompt a general to energetic preparations to retrieve his tarnished laurels, it was such an experience as General McClellen had passed through. The campaign toward Richmond, undertaken on his favorite line and began with loud promises of the speedy annihilation of the enemy, had ended in that enemy's assuming the initiative, invading the territory of the loyal States and compelling McClellan's hasty retreat to cover the capital. The country, which had lavished its resources to furnish that General with an incomparable army, felt the profoundest humiliation and mortification at the disastrous disappointment of its just expectations, and after Lee's retreat began to look anxiously for a blow to be struck that would retrieve the national honor. Antietam having been fought about the middle of September, there was a prospect of a season of a couple of months, during which the state of the roads and the weather would favor military operations, and one would suppose that he would eagerly avail himself of this opportunity to strike a blow. As usual with him he was during this period constantly promising to do so. On the 27th he wrote to General Halleck: "When the river rises so that the enemy cannot cross in force, I purpose concentrating the army somewhere near Harper's Ferry and then moving," etc. Well, shortly after, this condition was fulfilled, and still he remained inactive. The burden of all his communications of this period was for more men, and still more men, though he had now under his command an army 150,000 strong. On the 6th of October he was peremptorily ordered to "cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy, or drive him South. Your army *must* move now while the roads are good." Week after week passed without the order being obeyed.—To cover up his disobedience he has much to say in his Report of the deficiency of the army in shoes, clothing, etc.; but the hollowness of this pretense is fully displayed in the letters of General Meigs and Halleck, and even by his own chief quartermaster, General Ingalls. Besides, even if there were slight deficiencies in this respect, as there will be in every army, (though no army in the world was ever supplied as McClellan's was,) it would still have been better for him to have moved with this drawback than, by waiting to supply the deficit, to throw the time of moving over to the bad season. Said a corps commander in his army to the writer,

* Report on the Conduct of the War, vol. 1, p. 368.

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on the rainy November morning when the movement finally began, "We could better have advanced in September or October with the army *barefoot* than we can now perfectly supplied!"

After nearly two months delay, General McClellan was *pried* from his base by an imperative order, just as he had been *pried* out of Washington by the like means in the preceding April, and he began his forward movement by the inner line, east of the Blue Ridge. But it soon became evident from the slowness of his movements, the spirit in which he acted, and the complications into which he had plunged himself with the military authorities at Washington, that no good results could be expected from his campaign. He was accordingly ordered to resign command of the army at Warrenton, on the 5th of November.

Thus closes a career certainly among the most extraordinary on record, and not less extraordinary from the record General McClellan has given of it to the world in the Report which has formed the subject-matter of this critique. But it is not yet possible for any man to follow out in the complex web of historic cause and effect all the results that have come, and may yet come, from that career. These results are more and other than military, and they did not cease when his military career closed. If, having failed as a military commander, he had left us merely the legacy of disaster we inherited from him, if we had been only destined to find that the man we had chosen for a leader in the dread ordeal into which the nation was plunged by the war was a mere blunderer and incompetent, we might curse our folly and thank heaven for having raised up other men to fight our battles. But he left us another heritage than that of military calamities. He darkened men's minds, and paralyzed their arms, with doubts and fears. The nation had put forth its strength lavishly only to see it wasted; but we could have borne this, had not the very springs of confidence been sapped by the charge that all this waste, these disasters, were due to the incompetence and malevolence of the Administration. While still in command, McClellan lent the weight of his endorsement to the rising spirit of faction which sought to throw all the blame of his failures upon an Administration which the people were taught to believe had by its influence baulked all his brilliant plans, and withheld the material needed to their execution. On being removed from command, McClellan put these slanders formally on record in his so-called Report. He has ended by becoming the leader of a party which, going on the effect produced by these vilifications of the Administration, seeks to obtain control of the destinies of this nation. I have attempted to expose the falsity of these charges, if not with the expectation of silencing the clamor of men seeking their greatness in their country's ruin, at least with the hope of disabusing honest men of mistaken notions long assiduously inculcated, and anticipating for the military conduct of Mr. Lincoln's Administration a part of that justice which history will accord it.

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